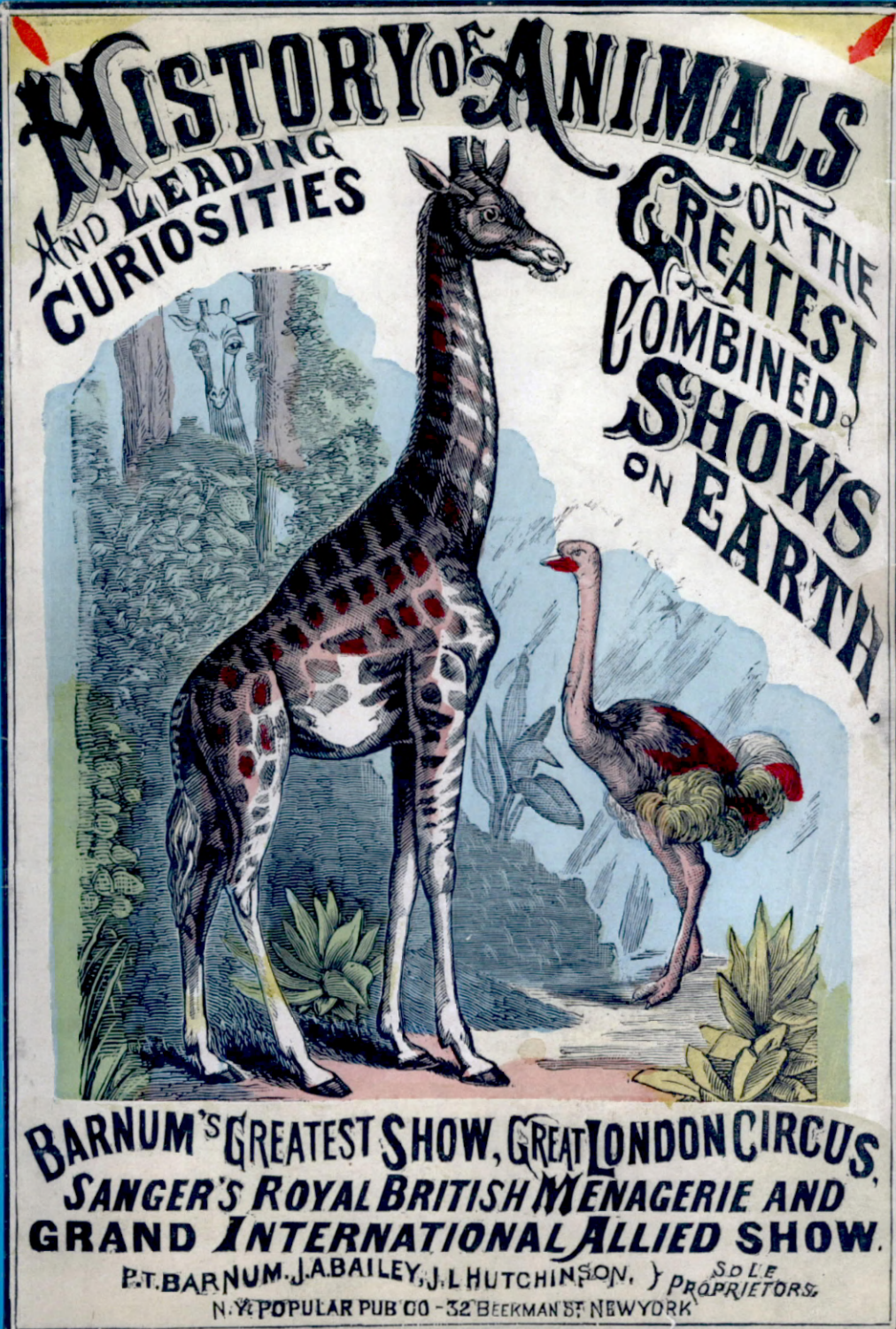


# BANDWAGON

JULY-AUGUST 2011



**HISTORY OF ANIMALS**  
**AND LEADING CURIOSITIES**

**GREATEST OF THE COMBINED SHOWS ON EARTH**

**BARNUM'S GREATEST SHOW, GREAT LONDON CIRCUS,**  
**SANGER'S ROYAL BRITISH MENAGERIE AND**  
**GRAND INTERNATIONAL ALLIED SHOW.**

P.T. BARNUM, J. BAILEY, J. L. HUTCHINSON, } <sup>SOLE</sup> PROPRIETORS,  
N.Y. POPULAR PUB'G CO - 32 BECKMAN ST. NEW YORK

The illustration depicts a tall giraffe with a patterned coat of brown spots on a white background, standing on the left. To its right is an ostrich with a long neck and a plumed tail. In the background, a smaller giraffe is visible through a wooded area. The entire scene is framed by a double-line border.

# BANDWAGON

**The Journal Of The Circus Historical Society**

Vol. 55 No. 4

**FRED D. PFENING III**

JULY-AUGUST 2011

**EDITOR AND PUBLISHER**

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## OUR COVER

Booklets describing exotic animals were commonly sold in menageries from at least the 1840s until about the turn of the twentieth century. Most were printed on a cheap pulp paper, many by the New York Popular Publishing Company.

The example on our cover, sold on the Barnum and London Circus 1881, is typical of the genre. It measures approximately 7" x 10" and contains 32 pages, most of which relate the natural histories of wild animals from lions and tigers and bears to bats, dolphins and whales. Obviously inclusion in the book was not a guarantee that the actual animal was part of the menagerie.

A quick examination of surviving books indicates that the text and illustrations inside changed little from show to show or from decade to decade. This one strays a little from the norm by including an account of the formation of

the Barnum and London Circus that year. One imagines children who read this book skipped over the story of the great combination in favor of learning about badgers, yaks, and hedgehogs. Original pamphlet from the collection of Dale Williams.

## CHS BROCHURE

Seventy-eight new and reinstated members of the Circus Historical Society are listed in this issue, the most ever. This surge is mainly the result of the new CHS brochure and membership application being sent to members of the Circus Fans Association and the Circus Model Builders who were not members of our organization.

The response was excellent, confirming that when circus aficionados are exposed to *Bandwagon* and the Circus Historical Society, a significant number of them will join the society. Further mailings are planned.

Increased membership translates into increased revenue which keeps the organization financially sound and allows for continued upgrading of *Bandwagon*.

Those wishing to acquire copies of the brochure and membership application to pass along to non-members may do so by contacting Secretary-Treasurer Bob Cline at 2707 Zoar Road, Cheraw, South Carolina 29520-4113.

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I certify that all information furnished on this form is true and complete. I understand that anyone who furnishes false or misleading information on this form or who omits material or information requested on the form may be subject to criminal sanctions (including fines and imprisonment) and/or civil sanctions (including civil penalties). (Signed) Fred D. Pfening III, Editor and Publisher. 30 September 2011

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# "CUTTING UP OLD CIRCUS MONEY"

by Harry Barnet

*Part three of this series appeared in the April 2, 1921 issue of The Dearborn Independent; part four appeared in the April 16, 1921 issue of the same publication.*

## III. H-e-y R-u-b-e!

When the cry of "Hey Rube" goes shrilling and darting like a crazy thing among the tents and wagons of a circus it means the commencement of a free-for-all fight between the town people and the showmen.

The cry is the name for a battle, and it also is raised by the show people. Then everybody with the outfit grabs a tent stake, or whatever sort of a fighting tool there is at hand, keeps up the cry of "h-e-y r-u-b-e," and begins to crack every head in sight that doesn't belong to the aggregation.

Few outsiders, however, can visualize a hey rube. Although there have been many classic fights beneath the white tops, not many first-hand accounts of them have appeared in print, because their record is buried in the unwritten history of the circus.

"Fights between the town people and the circus folks start mighty easy," said Governor John F. Robinson one day when he was rumaging into his recollection, and bringing out material for this series of interviews with him on the traditions of the circus that heretofore have been handed down only by word of mouth; from circus generation to circus generation.

"I make that statement out of the experience of the seventy years that I spent under circus canvas as a performer and an owner," he continued. "My father started a circus about a hundred years ago, and I was born late in 1843. From the time I was eighteen months old I was a performer with the show, until Pa retired from the business. Then I took over the ownership of the show, and owned it for

fifty years, when I passed it on to my son.

"During that time I've been through some of the biggest battles in circus history. Our show got the reputation of being the toughest show in America for rowdies to tackle, and I guess we earned that reputation. We never hunted trouble, that is certain, and we did everything we could do to keep out of it, but when it came our way it was seldom that we got the worst of it.

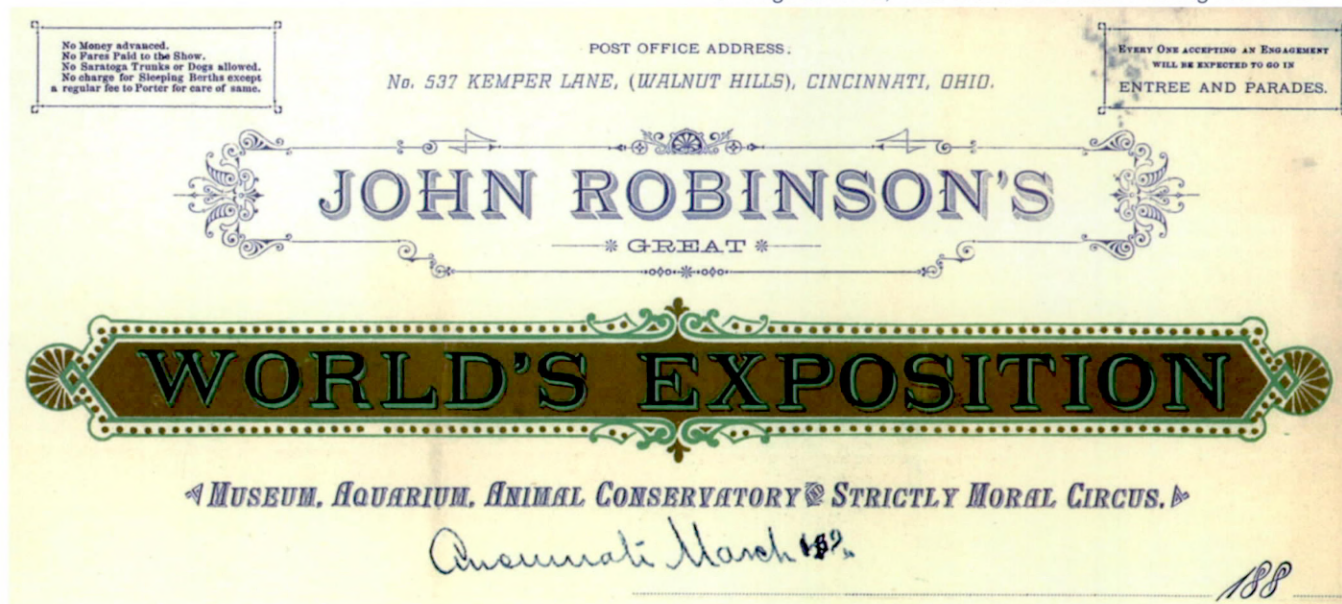
"In old days there was a bully, sometimes three or four of them, in every village," the Governor went on, and warmed to his subject, "and they had an idea that if they could lick a showman, no matter how puny or sickly or small he was, their reputations as bad men would be established forever. The rowdies never were satisfied until they got into a fight with us, and it always ended by them getting the worst of it.

"In localities where there were three or four bullies, they banded together to make a raid on the show. It got to be quite an event for us to go through a village or a town without a rumpus of some kind, so we had to carry several good fighters with the show to accommodate these fellows.

"When Pa retired, and I took over the show, I made it a rule that as soon as we got into a town, and the rowdy showed up, we were to get him licked as quick as we could, and have the job done with. That was the best thing for all of us, because the question as to who was the best man was settled. Then we could go on and put up our tents, and give the performance with a little peace.

"If that wasn't done, the fellow would keep on annoying us, and

The John Robinson Circus was one of the first shows to use color stationary in the early 1880s. Company policy was stated in the left and right corner boxes. "No Saratoga Trunks or Dogs allowed," was one of the rules. Pfening Archives.



**CIRCUS.--ROBINSON & ELDRED**  
 will cause their great Southern Circus to perform in **ALEXANDRIA, ON FRIDAY, the 30th of April, and SATURDAY, the 1st day of May,** when will be presented a host of daring and graceful **EQUESTRIAN FEATS** by Master JAMES, Madame ROBINSON, Master JOHN, M<sup>lle</sup> HENRIETTA, the Misses LOUISE and CAROLINE CARLO, and the whole TROUPE, consisting of--

Sixty Star Performers and Auxiliaries.  
 Eighty superb HORSES, in splendid condition.  
 Fifteen intelligent and diminutive performing PONIES.

**THE CLOWNS.--**Signor FELIX CARLO and SAM LONG, will enliven and vary the performance with sallies of wit and mirthful repartee.

**CINDERELLA; OR THE LITTLE GLASS SLIPPER,** Produced at great expense, under the direction of Signor FELIX CARLO, will be performed, by twenty-five juveniles, the youngest being only 18 months old, while the oldest does not exceed 15 years.

The dress and appointments are of the most costly and correct description. In the space of a minute the ring is made to assume the appearance of a splendid Saloon; Cinderella is drawn in a truly beautiful Fairy Chariot by six performing Ponies of surpassing beauty; and, in fact, this delightful Equestrian spectacle is in every way worthy of approbation and applause.

The piece occupies an hour in performance.

Admission **25 CENTS.**

ap 22--eo5t T. U. TIDMARSH, Agent.

Robinson and Eldred newspaper ad from *Alexandria* (Virginia) *Gazette* of April 22, 1852. Note archaic rhetoric in ad, and emphasis on the southernness of the show.

it had to come sometime during the day. Sometimes two or three drunken men would spoil the whole day's business for us by intimidating people. They would be afraid to come to the circus because. Jim So-and-So, who was the bad man of the community, was in town with his friends, all of them drunk, and feeling mighty mean, and they were going to clean out not only the show, but the whole town.

"Later on, I hit on a very good plan that saved us a lot of fighting. As soon as we showed up in the town, and the bad man came around, I hired him as a special policeman for the show. I offered him any salary he asked, because he seldom collected it. I furnished him with a badge and a club, and got him to go along with the show if I could. In his own town he was all right and got along very well, but the next day he would run into the bully of the neighboring town, and nine times out of ten he would turn out to be the rankest coward you ever saw.

Usually, he would tear off his badge throw down his club, and run for the woods without waiting to be paid; he wanted to get away from there without any stops. I was always glad when the other fellow chased him. Then I hired the new man to take his place. In a day or two he would meet the bad man of the next county, and

show the white feather. I kept that up for a whole season, and it worked the best of anything we tried out. But I never considered these men a part of our organization; I just hired them to get rid of their nonsense.

"And a lot of these fellows who started fights in the old days weren't particularly hunting a fight with a showman. They seemed to get kind of crazy with the excitement of having a circus in town, and they would fight an elephant just as quick. Sometimes these fellows would follow the show for a week, trying to get a fight out of us. They'd travel on horseback right with us, and show up on the lot about the same time that we did.

"Down in Tennessee the grandson of one of the Presidents of the United States followed the show for several days, and he got pretty friendly with me. We then were traveling by wagon, and the jumps were short. And I kind of liked this President's grandson, though he was drinking pretty hard.

"One evening when the performance was about ready to start, he came to me and very confidentially said that he'd been following the show for several days trying to get the animal men to let him get in the cage with the white bear so he could fight it, but the animal men never would let him do it. He appealed to me, because he said he didn't think he could ever rest until he had tried it.

"Of course, I knew what fighting the white bear meant. This fellow would have a knife, and a pistol and probably a whole lot of his friends to help him and white bears cost a lot of money in those days. It took me the whole evening to get the idea out of his head, and then he was reluctant to leave the show.

"Right after the Civil War, and up to 1870, it was something awful to take a show into the South. There hadn't been a legitimate circus there for years, and the people were circus crazy. Pa had been traveling South with the circus all his life, and we had a world of friends and relatives there, but that was no protection.

"People in the South then were very clannish. The minute a stranger got into a community no matter if he came from the next county, if he wasn't known and couldn't be vouched for, it was taken for granted that he was a carpet-bagger, or someone with designs on the community, and, of course, he wasn't to be tolerated. The quicker he could be licked the better.

"We were the largest circus in that country, and we drew immense crowds. Show day was a holiday, and the men drank freely to celebrate. That made them lose their heads, and, as the most of them had been under fire for three or four years, some of them didn't know the war was over; they thought they had to keep on shooting. In that way there were a good many circus rows started that never otherwise would have occurred.

"To try to tone things down, for several years we carried forty or fifty muskets with the show. Every day we unpacked them, and stacked them right by the front door. They stayed there until we

**ROBINSON & ELDRED'S**  
**Circus, Menagerie,**  
 AND  
**Hippodrome,**  
**Has Arrived.**  
 And will open at Reynolds's Lot, on Meeting street, on  
**THIS EVENING, FEB 21,**  
 And continue every Evening during the week The  
**Equestrian Troupe**  
 is composed of the best talent that Europe and America  
 can furnish.  
 The world renowned FRANCONI is connected with  
 the establishment. Feb 25

Robinson and Eldred's Circus, Menagerie and Hippodrome newspaper ad from *The Charlestown* (South Carolina) *Mercury* of February 25, 1856.

tore down at night, unless there was a commotion of some sort, or anything that looked like there was going to be trouble. Then the boss canvasman blew his whistle, and all the working men came running, picked up a musket apiece, fell into rank and file like a company of soldiers, and waited for orders.

"Then we had a pistol holster scheme. We bought two hundred pistols, and had a holster made for every man with the show. He wore two of them strapped to his waist while he worked. The holsters were numbered, beginning with 200 and better, and a man would be driving stakes with a big pistol in a holster on each hip, one maybe numbered 280 and the other 460, so it looked as though we had a thousand of them instead of only two hundred. With the

Robinson & Co.'s Circus & Theatre newspaper ad from *The Weekly Georgia Telegraph* of December 14, 1858. The Robinson show continued to tour the South after John Robinson and Gilbert Eldred ended their partnership.

**A MERRY CHRISTMAS!**  
**Two Companies in one Tent**  
**FOR ONE PRICE OF ADMISSION.**  
**ROBINSON & CO'S**  
**CIRCUS & THEATRE,**



CONSISTING OF  
**DARING ACTS OF EQUESTRIANISM!**  
**Acrobatic and Gymnastic Exercises, Herculean Feats, &c.**  
Interspersed and enlivened by the comicalities of the CLOWN. Consolidated for a Southern Campaign, WILL PERFORM AT  
**Macon, on Saturday, Monday and TUESDAY, DEC. 25, 27, & 28.**  
Afternoon Performance at 2 o'clock; Evening at 6 o'clock. ADMISSION 50 cents, children and servants, half price.  
The Entertainment differs materially from old foggy Circuses. Having SCENERY and FIXTURES ample to present the GREAT

**Moral Drama**  
OR THE  
**Days of '76:**  
OR THE

"Times that Tried Men's Souls."  
On which Yankee Miller will "Stand Down" the Hall. This great Drama is founded on incidents which occurred during the Revolution. It exceeds anything ever introduced in public amusements.  
Remember, the two Companies perform in the same Tent. Circus Company in the Ring; Theatre on a regular elevated Stage, with splendid Scenery. The great Drama—"Days of '76"—will only be performed at night.  
For particulars see Pic torial and Descriptive Bill.  
dec 7

muskets they made a pretty good showing, and I think that scheme is the only thing that took us safely through that country.

"And the same thing held true in the North. The old soldiers, especially in Ohio, Indiana and Illinois, wanted their fun on show day, and where there were a lot of them in a community they were pretty bad, and gave us plenty to do. So I adopted an additional scheme with them. We gave them a drink or two, and jollied them along, and after a while they would sit down and commence to tell their troubles to one another. Eventually, they went to sleep.

"We all carried scissors, and somebody would slip up and cut off their coat tails, which made short jackets of their coats. Then a big round hole was cut in the seats of their trousers and their underwear, and their shirt tails were cut off. When they woke up and saw their plight, instead of hunting trouble, or going uptown and getting another drink, they would make a beeline for home, or out into the country where they could get some more clothes. And we had several ways of

trimming their clothes. Sometimes their trousers were ripped from the leg bottoms to waistline, and their underwear the same way. When they got up they had practically nothing on, except their shirts and collars. It always was a mystery to them how that was done, but it saved us a lot of fighting.

"The first hey rube I remember," the Governor said after a pause, "was when I was a mighty little boy in Port Royal, Virginia. Some of the toughs of the town started a row with us, and they got the worst of it. Next morning the whole show was arrested, men, women and children, and when the authorities came to arrest us they told Pa that they would release everybody with the show if he would give up the man who did the fighting.

"They said that their witnesses told them that the man who did the most of the harm to the town rowdies was a Mr. Hey Rube; that every once in a while during the row a circus man would call his name, and down would go another town fellow. So they concluded that Mr. Rube was the man they wanted. And they even had a description of him. He was over six feet in height, and his coloring was dark. While the fight was going on he carried a club over seven feet long."

The Governor chuckled.  
"Hey rube, you know, is just the rallying cry of the circus people whenever trouble starts," he added.

"It was no uncommon thing for us to have to pull the wagons around in a circle, and hide behind them and shoot through the spokes in the wheels, like the pioneers did when the Indians made raids on them," he went on.

"The last time I remember of doing that was in Lebanon, Tennessee, while we still were traveling by wagons. During the afternoon,

**A WAIT THE COMING OF THE OLD RELIABLE.**  
The only Museum, Aquarium, Menagerie and Circus on earth.  
The original and only

**OLD JOHN ROBINSON,**

on his Grand Annual Triumphal Tour, with his vast and diversified collection of Rare Beasts and Birds; his extraordinary Aquarium of Living Marine Monsters; his Museum of Animate and Inanimate Wonders, and his peerless double Troupe of Equestrians, Gymnasts and Athletes.



**Immense Recluse RHINOCEROS,** a specialty with this exhibition, and imported at an expense of nearly \$15,000—beyond all question, the only individual of her particular species ever brought alive from Africa.

**Four Monster Living SEA LIONS,** with their young. *Macrorhinus Proboscis*, or Sea Elephants, with mane erect like Forest Monarchs, requiring over two hundred pounds of fresh fish daily for their subsistence. They are the only ones on exhibition in the world, and can be seen in the Aquarium, during the hours of exhibition, sporting in an artificial lake of ocean water.

Don't confound this gigantic organization with any other show bearing the name of Robinson, for it is in no way, shape or manner connected with any or either of them, but is the original **OLD JOHN ROBINSON'S** only, who has owned and managed shows for over fifty years, and never deceived the people. Remember the day and date. Do not forget that we are coming with an avalanche of talent. Wait for us.

**ALEXANDRIA,**  
**MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 9th.**  
Admission 50c; Children under 10 years 25c.  
aug 19, 24 & 25, 7—twA 19, 23

By 1872 the southern theme had been replaced by an emphasis on the Robinson Circus's longevity. Newspaper ad from *Alexandria* (Virginia) *Gazette*, August 24, 1872.

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a rowdy came on the lot, and made himself offensive to the women—he went around to the back of the canvas, and slit the side wall of the women's dressing room with a sharp knife. Then he walked through, and in among them while they were putting on their tights.

"Of course, they screamed, and covered themselves as well as they could. One of my performers heard the commotion, and he came running from the men's dressing room—it was just before the matinee—and saw this fellow there. My man hit the town fellow, and knocked him down. Then he picked him up, and threw him over the side wall.

"Well, the rowdy also got a pretty good beating after he landed on the outside, and it took him the most of the afternoon to get over it. When he got away from where he had been thrown, he went to his friends, and told a story about having been beaten up by showmen while he was innocently looking around. Then they formed a gang, and wanted to clean out the show.

"We pulled the cages and the wagons around to make a barricade, and got all of the show people in the center of it, and also the horses. Then we got shovels and dug the center out of the ring and piled the dirt on the edges to make a breastwork, because it looked as though we were in for a hard fight. Then we laid behind that breastwork waiting for whatever was going to happen.

"The rowdies circled around us for a while, shooting occasionally, but we laid quiet. After a while they went up town, and rang the courthouse bell. Of course, the decent people of the town came running out of their homes, and wanted to know what was the matter. The rowdies said they were going down to clean out the show, and they did drum up quite a crowd to follow them back to the lot. But we presented a couple of volleys, and too strong a front to them, and they again went back.

"The upshot of the whole matter was that we stayed there until daylight. There was a lot of shooting, but none of us was hurt. About five o'clock, when the crowd went up town to get some more drinks, we threw the tents and the properties on the wagons without paying much attention how they were loaded, hitched up, and quietly made our way to the next stand. For a wonder, we weren't followed.

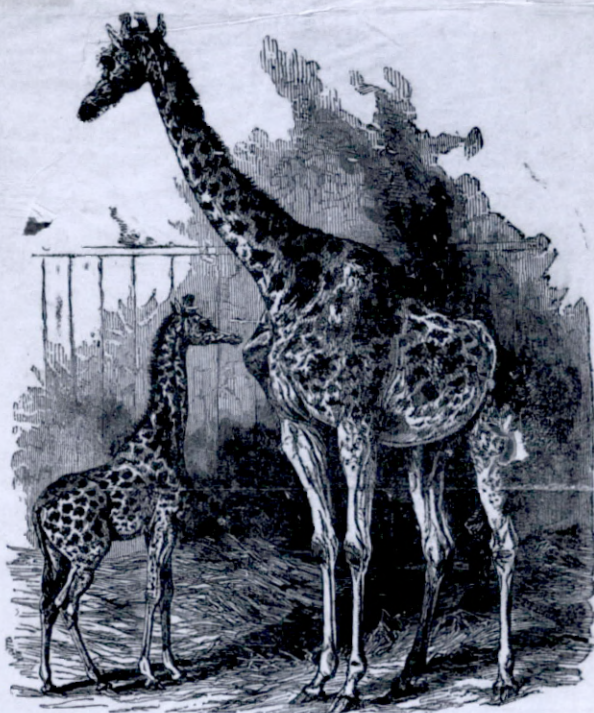
"But the saddest circus rumpus I ever saw occurred over in a little town in Virginia. The day we showed there the rough element was more or less drunk, and like fellows in that condition, they were hunting trouble from the minute the show pulled on the lot. And among these rowdies was the son of one of the most prominent citizens in the town.

"When the afternoon show was well under way, one of the rowdies—a big fellow—got up off of the seats, and walked into the ring. Two or three of his friends followed him, among them this son of the prominent citizen. They sat down on the ring bank, with their feet hanging over into the ring track, so the horses couldn't gallop or work.

"We let them alone for a while, and when we finished all of the performance that we could without requiring the ring track, there was nothing else to do, except to put in some horse acts. The first horses we put into the ring the rowdies kicked at as they ran around, until they stopped running. Several times we asked them to get out, and to sit on the seats, but they paid no attention to anybody. They just sat still and talked to themselves as though there wasn't a soul within a thousand miles of them. We had to do all the talking to them, because the audience knew they were ruffians, and wouldn't

Rare handbill used by the Robinson Circus for its July 7, 1873 engagement in Quincy, Illinois. Milner Library collection, Illinois State University.

EXCURSION TO QUINCY, MONDAY, JULY 7th.



## MAKE UP PARTIES! EXCURSION RATES

ON THE  
Mississippi Valley & Western Railway,  
FROM  
KEOKUK TO QUINCY,  
—ON—  
MONDAY, JULY 7, '73.

Parties residing at Keokuk and all way stations will be carried to Quincy for

**HALF FARE!**

Arrangements have been made to carry 2000 Persons. Trains will leave Keokuk at 7.00 A. M., and arrive at Quincy at 9.25 A. M. Tickets good on all Trains.

This will afford everybody an opportunity of seeing

## OLD JOHN ROBINSON'S GREAT WORLD'S EXPOSITION!

Moved by Special Trains. Performers, Horses and Animals all fresh and not worn out by dusty dirt roads. JOHN ROBINSON actually has  
2 Magnificent Bands, 2 Beautiful Band Chariots, 1 Grand and Lofty Tableau Car, with a Royal Bengal Tiger on the Deck, 1 Queen Mab's Fairy Chariot, drawn by 20 Beautiful Ponies, 1 Cinderella Chariot, drawn by 30 Little Ponies, making 5 Splendid Golden Chariots, being 3 more than have ever been exhibited in any one Procession before.

### The Largest Pavilions ever erected

ICE WATER passed gratuitously to the Patrons of Old John Robinson's Great World's Exposition, that they may enjoy the Comforts of Home. Elegant Seats, Airy Canvases—constructed upon an Entirely New and Novel Plan. Ventilation Complete. A current of air constantly through the acres of canvases.

### Will be on Exhibition, 52 Cages of Wild Beasts.

- 5 Great Golden Chariots,
- 60 Smallest Ponies in America,
- 168 Ring Horses,
- 100 Male Performers,
- 40 Musicians,
- 20 Female Celebrities,
- 15 Sunbright Tents,
- 1 5-Ton Elephant,
- 1 3-Ton Double Horned Rhinoceros,
- 1 9-ft. 2 in. South American Giraffe,
- 1 1-Ton Red Manned Sea Lion,
- 8 Black Pacific Sea Lions,
- 1 Hippopotamus, from Blue River Nile,
- 1 Giant Ostrich, 17 feet high,
- 15 Asiatic Lions with Cubs,
- 1 Snow White Yak of Tartary,
- 1 Polar or White Bear,
- 1 Spiral Horned Eland,
- 1 African Harle Beetle,
- 1 Cassowary, large as a New York Alderman,
- 1 King Vulture,
- 1 3-Horned and 3-eyed Nondescript Taurus from the Holy Land, as large as an ox.

Together with every variety of LEOPARDS, COUGARS, PANTHERS, LLAMAS, HYENAS, CAMELS, DROMEDARIES, GNUS, CROCODILES, BAHAMA (TURTLES, MONKEYS, BIRDS AND REPTILES in such quantities that it will require one week for the visitor to do justice in examining the many rare works of our Divine Creator.

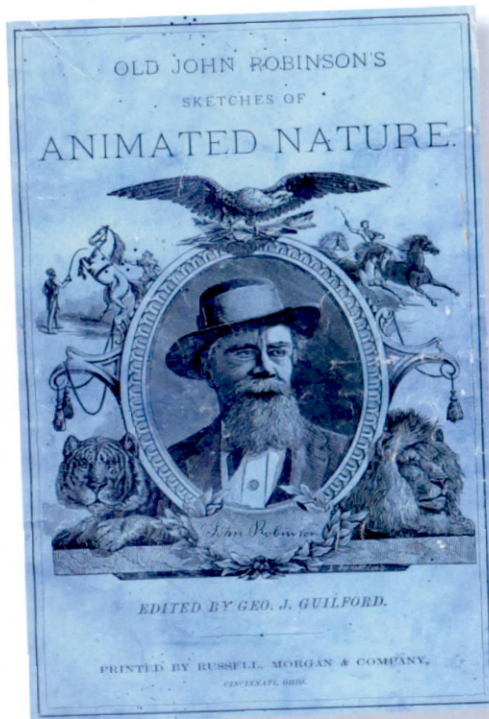
**THE STRICTLY MORAL CIRCUS!**  
the most complete school and the very highest order of Riding, Athletic and Gymnastic Exercises ever witnessed, many of the acts created especially to give additional lustre to the sparkling reputation of Old John Robinson as a manager, high-toned gentleman and amusement creator.

### 3 PERFORMANCES GIVEN

AT 9 A. M., 1 P. M. AND 7 P. M.

TO ACCOMMODATE THE VAST MULTITUDES.

OLIVER F. MYERS, General Director of Advertisements.



Robinson Circus animal booklet from 1875. Circus World Museum collection.

two feet of the boy he pulled a pistol and shot his father dead. The performance was finished after that, but it wasn't a lively one.

"But that boy suffered for what he did," the Governor concluded. "We showed that town nearly every year after that, and the family home was close enough to our show lot that he could hear everything that went on in the tents—the music and the noise of the performance. And every time I passed the house, he was hanging over the front gate, crying.

"However, the most famous circus fight in history was our Jacksonville [Texas] row," the Governor went on after a pause. "The day we showed there it was raw and cold and nasty. It seemed as though all our worst fights came on just such days—probably because everybody drank more when the weather was bad.

"We commenced to have a world of trouble with the rough element before we had the last wagon on the lot—we were traveling by rail then—because they all were drunk, and hunting a fight. When the afternoon show was started, three or four ruffians came over and sat in the ring, so that the only part of the performance we could give was there we had no use for the horses.

"Finally, we used up all our trapeze and other acts, and wanted to bring in the horses. We did bring them in. The rowdies persisted in interfering with them, and finally two of my men went into the ring, took the rowdies by their throats and their shoulders, walked them out of the ring, and pushed them down on the lower tier of seats.

"Well, the performance went on, and these fellows commenced talking it over among themselves. One of them allowed that De Vere had choked him. Then there were many in the audience who sided against us. They wanted to kill the circus man for hurting one of their citizens. Of course, it was only a little while before things began to warm up, but we managed to get the performance finished, and the crowd went up town.

"The place didn't have over a hundred buildings in it, and two-thirds of them were bar rooms. When the rowdies got up town they commenced to drink. They soon had a crowd around them, and everybody began to drink. Finally, they concluded that they wanted

have a thing to do with them.

"Finally, I picked out two of my best men, and told them to go and ask these fellows to get back on the seats where they belonged. They made some insulting remarks to my men. About this time, when it looked as though the performance would be broken up by a fight, the father of this boy got up from where he had been sitting with his wife, and came over to see if he couldn't prevail

on his son to behave himself. Before he got within

to arrest De Vere, and they got out a warrant for him. They didn't know his name, but that didn't make any difference.

"Then they came down to the cars hunting for De Vere. We took them all through the sleepers, and showed them he wasn't there. But they made a pretty good search for him, even to the extent of tearing out the berths. Of course, he wasn't there. We knew what it meant that afternoon, and we hid him out in the woods—stuck him down in a lot of brush, and told him to stay there until we came for him.

"We were to show there that night, but after these fellows went up town the second time they began to drink so hard, and raised the devil so thoroughly, that my brother Gil came to my private car.

"'Jack,' he said, 'I don't think we'd better show here tonight. I think the best we can do is to pack up and get out.'

"Finally, I concluded we had better get out. Everything was packed and the wagons were down at the railroad, and the train was pretty well loaded, when four or five of these fellows came to the train.

"They yelled and whooped until they had a big crowd together. They kept calling for 'that big fellow —' De Vere, you know and Gil kept telling them he wasn't any place around.

"'Why, you big skunks,' they taunted us, 'we'll clean you out. You won't fight.'

"And they tormented my men so that they were on the point of leaving the show where it was if we didn't let them put a stop to the abuse. Gil came up to my car again.

"'Jack,' he said, 'it's pretty rough down there. I don't believe we can stand it much longer.'

"'Well,' I told him, 'you mustn't have any row down at the cars. Don't have any row. But if you do get into it, take care of yourselves.'

"When Gil got back to where they were loading, some fellow put a pistol to the head of a workingman whose name was Jim Robinson. Jim jerked his head away, and the pistol went off, but the powder only burned his face. The bullet didn't strike him.

"That started things. Guns commenced to pop, and knives to flash. The smoke from the pistols indicated a pretty good battle was going on. Of course, like all circus rows, it wasn't very many minutes before the rowdies were down and out, and getting the worst of it all around, because in those days we were prepared for a fight at any time. One or two of the rowdies were badly hurt. In fact, they didn't live long after the fight.

"The railroad ran through the center of the town, down the main street, and there were stores on each side. The rowdies made a hasty retreat into one of them, and our fellows followed them. They were so close behind that the rowdies hardly had time to get the door closed and the solid window shutters closed when my men got up on the porch in front of the store. They received a volley out of the windows, but fortunately nobody was killed.

"There happened to be two or three stanchions lying loose and close by the porch. Our fellows got them and battered the door down. When the door fell the mob went out the back way. Our fellows kept after them, and they went right into the next store, through the back door and windows, and through the store into the street, with my men right behind them. They chased the rowdies through nearly all the stores in town, and then came down the street to the corner to where I stood. It looked to me then that they had done enough, and I called the men off. They started back to loading the show on the train.

"I didn't think there was a soul left around any place, but all at once, when one of my canvasmen was walking along the side of a car somebody ran up behind him, and stuck a big knife in his back.

"Well, Gil happened to see the fellow with the knife, and he took a shot at him. He was at the head of our crowd, down near some cotton bales on the platform of the depot, and just as he shot somebody yelled to him to look out, and he turned around. A fellow ran out of a store with a shotgun in his hands, and took aim at Gil. He jumped behind a cage, and just as he did the gun went off. I suppose a dozen to twenty buckshot went through that cage, which happened to have a hartebeest in it. It didn't live long after that, and when it died we cut it open. There were six big buckshot in him.

Robinson ad from 1875. Note use of slogan "Greatest Show on Earth." Circus World Museum collection.

## Largest and Best in the World.

### JOHN ROBINSON'S Great World's Exposition,



Museum, Menagerie, Aquarium, and  
STRICTLY MORAL CIRCUS,  
WILL EXHIBIT AT

**Carlyle, Wednesday, May 19th.**

Indorsed by the Press as the Best.

Pronounced by the Public the Greatest.

This Monster Organization, unrivaled for worth, variety, excellence and merit, embraces The Largest Menagerie, The Greatest Aquarium, The Most Replete Museum, and the Very Best Circus in the World, all of which will be exhibited under the

**MANY SPACIOUS PAVILIONS,**

For One Price of Admission.

Our Actions of the Past a Guarantee for the Future.

Its immense proportions, mammoth dimensions and colossal magnitude mark it as the

**Greatest Show on Earth,**

EMBRACING

1,000 Living Wild Beasts and Rare Birds.	2,000 Men and Horses.
5,000 Animate and Inanimate Curiosities.	60 Diminutive Ponies.
40 Musicians.	162 Ring Horses.
20 Lady Riders, European Celebrities.	100 Male Performers.
5 Golden Chariots, costing \$40,000 in Gold.	50 Cages of Wild Beasts.

The colossal dimensions of this Great Combination can be conceived from the fact that

**221,760 Feet of Canvas**

were used to manufacture the many MANMOTH PAVILIONS necessary to exhibit the Miraculous Wonders of this, the Greatest Show on Earth.

The only Exhibition in America that has received the highest encomiums from Clergymen of all denominations, the Press and the Public, for its morality and superiority. Our Vast Pavilions crowded with the lovers of Natural History.

**Over \$1,000,000**

Invested in this great enterprise—three times larger in every department than ever.

**Daily Expenditure, \$2,500.**

Rhinoceros, Giant Ostriches, Giraffes, Hippopotami, Sea Lions, Elands, Hart-Beests, Pacific Seals, Yaks, Herds of Sacred Cattle, and the wonderful Three-Horned and Three-Eyed Bovine from the Holy Land, are specialties only to be seen in this Great World's Exposition.

"We began to load the horses down at the end of the train away from where the first fighting took place, when along came a lot more rowdies. They stood back in the dark, and commenced shooting at my men as they were loading the horses. They hit one of my men, but didn't kill him. But that intimidated my men, so that it was all that I could do to keep them at work, and to get the show loaded.

"After a while things got so serious that something had to be done, so one of my assistant bosses went up to the oil wagon, and got three or four buckets of coal oil. He carried them into the square in front of the stores while the mob was shooting at us half a square up the street. The boss yelled to the crowd that if another shot was fired, or he heard anybody make another threat, he was going to saturate the store in front of him, and, in fact, the whole town, and set fire to it. To make his threat good, he threw the oil on the roof of the store. That settled things there, and a little after dark we got loaded, and got away, as we thought, without any further trouble to be expected.

"But it only had begun. About a mile and a half out of the town there was a trestle that we had to go over. Some of the rowdies slipped out there and commenced to saw it in two, while a lot of others hid themselves in the bushes along the railroad. They shot into our train as we went along, but everybody was well protected, except one canvasman, who let his foot hang over the edge of a wagon. He got his big toe shot off. The fellow who did that must have taken good aim.

"When we got to the trestle it held together while our trains went over it, but the next train, which happened to be a freight, was wrecked.

"Some little distance down the road there was a junction and the rowdies had telegraphed down there to stop the show train, or to telegraph to Houston to arrest the whole show; that warrants were on the way. The telegraph operator there was friendly to us, and he didn't repeat the message. So, we went through without a hitch.

"That was a sort of a surprise to the rowdies, because we were billed for Houston, and they thought we were going to stop there, but we were routed to Galveston first. Then we were to come back to Houston, and go up through the state. By the time they discovered their mistake we were in Galveston, where we were to show four days, Friday, Saturday, Monday and Tuesday.

"We didn't go into the state again for years. Then a party of Texas lawyers and newspapermen made a tour of the North. They intended to visit Cincinnati, but nobody seemed to pay much attention to their visit.

"Gil, I said to my brother one day shortly before the party was due to arrive, 'here's how we can help ourselves in Texas. Let's get the mayor, and a bunch of our friends and entertain these Texas fellows right.'

"And we did it. When the delegation arrived we took them to one of the big hotels, and had a spread for them. The mayor welcomed them, and there was a lot of speechmaking. Incidentally, one of the speakers said that Cincinnati was the home of the Robinson circus, and of our family. One of the Texas lawyers got up, and made a great speech.

"If ever the Robinson circus comes to Texas,' he wound up, 'they can own the state.'

"Now's our chance," I whispered to Gil.

"We got that lawyer off to one side, and told him the circumstances. He said he would fix it up all right, and he did as soon as he got back home."

#### IV. Old-Time Acts

"You've seen the equestrian statue of Jackson in Jackson Square,

New Orleans, haven't you?" suddenly said Governor John F. Robinson one evening when we sat in easy chairs in the spacious second floor, southwest corner room of the family home at the Terrace Park, Ohio, winter quarters of his circus, and puffed contentedly at long, black, blunt-on-the-fire-end cigars.

This room was his office. In it for many years the Governor planned the campaigns of his show in much the same manner that a general outlines and oversees the operations of his troops. There were many pictures and curios on the walls. Each one of them suggested to him now and then during the evening a story from the unwritten history of the American circus that for several weeks he had been telling to me as the opportunity offered.

And there is no one more able to tell that history. For seventy years the Governor was a tent show performer and owner. He assumed the ownership of his father's circus well more than a half century ago, and "toted" it into every part of the United States during that time, building it until in its heyday it was one of the largest aggregations in America. That is how he came by his title; he was the ruler of a wandering city. In the fullness of time he turned the show over to his son, completing three generations of circus owners in one family—something that up to this time no other circus family has done. During the seventy years of his active business life the Governor helped to make the greater part of the traditions that have been handed down only by word of mouth from generation to generation of the followers of the White Tops.

"How's that, Governor?" I queried.

He repeated the question, and indicated a picture of the statue that hung above his great, old-fashioned desk.

"Many times," I replied.

"Well, Pa's horse was the model for that statue horse that Jackson sits on," he said.

"You know, in the old days of the circus," the Governor continued, "every showman of any prominence at all had a trained horse that is, the principal performers. Pa had a famous stallion, the color of old gold. His mane and tail were white. His name was Champion. One of his principal tricks was walking around the circus ring on his hind legs.

"That Jackson statue is the first equestrian one representing a horse rearing without props. Jackson is in full uniform, as though he is entering New Orleans with his chapeau raised in a salute. The statue was erected by the state of Louisiana in memory of Jackson and the battle of Chalmette Plains, and the old people around Jackson Square say that the forepart of the horse is hollow. But it isn't. He stands on his hind legs perfectly balanced, and he has stood that way for many years, during all of the tropical storms, and never moved an inch.

"Well, when the sculptor started to make his statue, his idea was to put a prop under the horse, or a brace, like every other equestrian statue, and then later he wanted to leave out the brace. And he wanted a good horse for a model. After several months investigation—maybe several years, I don't remember now—he hadn't found either a model or a way to get rid of the props. One day Champion was being exercised, and reared, while the sculptor was standing in a doorway watching him. The jam of the door made a line from the horse's feet through the body to the crest of the neck. The sculptor saw the legs of the rider and the front half of the horse, but the hind parts, and the body of the rider were behind the post. While the horse was reared that way the sculptor saw that he just shifted his weight so as to bring the center of gravity on his hind feet when he balanced for the jump. And he made the statue horse that way. It isn't even bolted down; it stands balanced.

"But people have changed since the days of Champion," the

Governor went on, "and so has the fashion in circus acts. Of course, a good many of those old-time acts would fall flat in a three ring show—there are so many wonders going on that one of them alone could not arouse the enthusiasm of the audience that the old acts did.

"When I learned to ride, the performance always wound up with some kind of a pantomime, or spectacular production, like 'Mazeppa,' or 'Scenes

from Donnybrook Fair,' and the riding acts also represented something. There was but one ring, you know, and that made the audience an intimate friend to every performer before the show was over, because they were so close together.

"Pa rode four horses at that time. He was one of the few four-horse equestrians in the world. One of his acts was named 'The Bottled Imp.' When I was a small boy, that act started a tradition among the Negroes around Booneville, Missouri, that we always carried the King of Hell with our show. And, I don't doubt but that you can find that tradition still in circulation around that town, if you find some very old darkies who always have lived there.

"In that act, Pa was dressed as the devil. When he rode his four horses he would whoop and yell like the devil himself. That got the audience so excited that they started to yell and whoop with him, and the act closed in an awful fuss.

"There was a flourishing Negro church in Booneville, and, strange to say, when the members found that we were coming to town, and especially when they learned that we were to show next to their church, they went to all of the white folks in the community to try to keep the circus out.

"Now, a darkey will sell his cook stove to go to the circus in that country, and all the rest of the darkies in the town were pleased as Punch to think that we were coming. But a revival had just closed in this church, and the ones who had religion had it awful bad. Of course, they had no effect on our showing the town. To scare the unrepentant darkies, the church-going ones told them frightful tales—that the circus was a thing of the devil, and that the Old Boy himself traveled right along with us.

"Well, that stirred darkey curiosity and fear to an awful pitch. The night of the show, the band and the little cracked church bell ran a noisy race to see which could pull the biggest crowd. The devil story pulled an awful crowd of darkies to the show, and they waited and watched every act, wanting to see the devil, yet half afraid that they would see him.

"Finally, Pa came into the ring, dressed as the devil, and making more noise and fuss than usual. Then the darkies began slipping down through the seats, and out under the sidewall at a terrific rate, and scampering off in the direction of the church. They'd seen the devil himself, and were seeking safety. When Pa finished the act there were but few darkies left on the colored seats—we always separate the whites and the blacks in that country.

"Pa walked out toward the dressing room, and concluded to slip across the lot and look into the church. He didn't stop to take off



Statute of Andrew Jackson in Jackson Square in French Quarter of New Orleans. John F. Robinson told Barnet that his father's horse was the model for the statue.

his make-up. He stood by the window for awhile. The old preacher was going on like only an old darkey preacher can.

"Oh, Mister Debbil," he yelled, and danced around like a crazy man, 'come heah dat Ah may choke yo' breaf frum yo' scahlet body. Ah nevah wuz so strong wid de power uv de Lawd,' he screeched, 'an' Ah will tear yo' jaw frum yo' haid, an' slew yo' lak Ah would a lion.'

"Then all of the aunties, and old fat mammies, chipped in with amens.

"Ah seed him; Ah seed him," one of the darkies who had been to the show ran in and yelled.

"Whar dat debbil? Whar dat debbil?" a lot of big darkies began to yell. "Show dat debbil to me."

"The aunties and mammies weaved in their seats, and prayed loud for the devil to appear that their men might annihilate him.

"Pa let them go on for a while, until they worked themselves up to an awful pitch; they drowned the noise of the band next door to them, he said. Those who had visited the circus, and saw the devil in person, got awful brave then, though they had sneaked out and joined the church crowd just a few minutes before.

"Then Pa stepped into the room without being noticed.

"Here I am," he said, "and I've got a bigger crowd than you have."

"The darkies turned and saw Pa. The preacher dived headfirst through a window back of him. Three or four others tried to follow. The first one was a mammy so fat that she stuck half way in the window, and hung there, squealing like a shoat fastened under a fence. Pa stood in the doorway, but no darkey would look at him, much less try to pass him. They finally got the mammy through the window, and the rest of them broke for the woods as fast as they could scamper.

"For years afterward, when we went into that section of the country the darkies came to the show fearfully, expecting to see the devil—they believed as much as they believed anything that he really traveled with us, and paid them a visit in their church

"Yes," the Governor mused, "those were great days. Especially did the clowns have a warm personal following to greet them wherever they went. From the ticket wagon standpoint everything else around the old-time wagon show could be left behind in the last town, just so the clown—there never was more than one real clown with the show—got in on time. The clowns did 'talking acts.' They were close to their audiences with the one ring shows, and became favorites in the territory we made every year—so much so that they used to have benefits in the towns where they had the most friends. And they got a lot of extra money that way. The most famous of these clowns was John Lowlow, who was with us for years. He quoted Shakespeare to his audiences, and was, in reality, a finished Shakespearean actor. But when we got three rings, 'talking clowns' went out of business; their audiences were too far away from them.

"But one of these 'talking clowns' gave me my financial start in the world," the Governor went on.

"It began when I fed a bag of cats to our elephant, Boliver. He

was one of the first elephants in this country, and Pa was awful proud of him. We hadn't had him more than three days when he got loose. He roamed the wilderness in the South for three days before we caught him, and what he did while he was loose started some awful hair-raising tales in that country about a terrible monster that came down from the skies, and tore things to pieces in little settlements.

"I wasn't more than six or seven years old, and that day mother bought me my first suit of clothes with long pants. The coat, I remember, was more of a man's coat, but I felt awful dressed up. After the matinee I went up town and bought some cakes and candy, and when I came back to the lot I was still eating them as I walked into the tent. I passed Boliver. We carried no menagerie tent then, you know, and the animals were grouped around one side of the ring, and the seats around the other side. Boliver reached out his trunk for some of the goodies, but I didn't give him any.

"As young as I was, I had been riding for a year or more, and when I came into the canvas, Pa was practicing some horses.

"Jack," he yelled to me, 'come over here and get ready to ride. Where have you been all this time?'

"I didn't answer him, because he worked me hard, and if he thought I'd been idling around he'd have given me a whaling before I started.

"So I stuffed what was left of the candy and cakes into the pocket of my coat, and hung it on a stake near the end of the string of animals and dens. Then I went into the ring.

"It wasn't long before I looked around, and there was Boliver, with my coat twisted in his trunk, shoving it into his mouth, cakes, candy and all. He had reached over and lifted it off

the stake.

"Well, I didn't yell at him. Neither did I jump off my horse. The damage was done' and I was heart-broken.

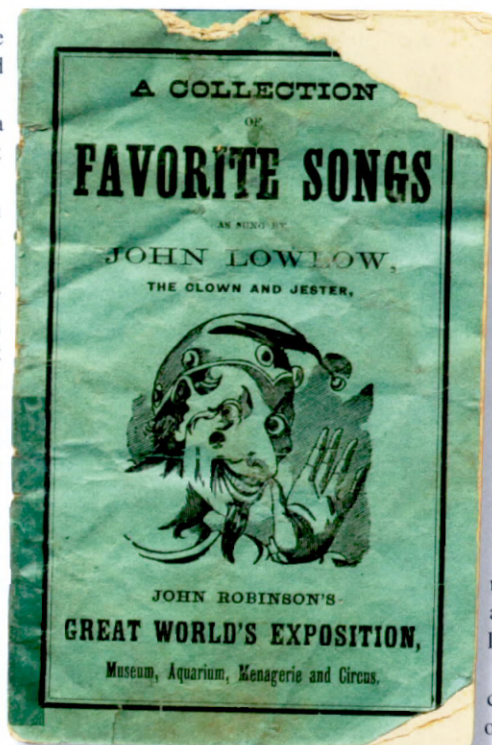
"When Pa noticed what was going on, he yanked me off the horse, and gave me a good thrashing for hanging my coat where Boliver could get it. Then he tossed me on to my pony, and gave me a double dose of practice.

"Now, I'm not a vindictive man, but I've always felt that if a man or a beast got the best of me he was about due for something. I wanted to get even with Boliver and Pa. So I began to study it over.

"Our principal clown was Sam Long. He was subject to cramp colic, so his nickname was 'Colicky.' Sam was going to have a benefit that night, and, as was the practice, he tried to get up something extra. He was going to have a cat piano, a narrow box, with each side notched, and six or eight cats put in it with their tails sticking out on one side, and their heads on the other. When Sam pulled their tails they yowled, and Sam called that music.

"To be sure of having enough cats, 'Colicky' advertised that every boy and girl bringing him a cat that afternoon would be put into the show that night on a free ticket. The result was that there was nothing but cats all over the dressing tent.

"When I got through practicing, I went into the dressing tent to think about the elephant and the licking. I noticed a couple of cats



The singing clown John Lowlow was associated with the John Robinson Circus for years. This songbook probably dates from the 1870s. Circus World Museum collection.

squirming in a bag alongside of me. So I picked up the bag, got two or three ears of corn, and carried them into the show canvas. I stood where the elephant could see me, and dropped the corn into the bag. Then I twisted the end of it on the stake where I had hung my coat, and walked out into the ring.

"It wasn't many seconds before I heard a terrible screech and a yowl. I turned and looked at the elephant. One of the cats was up against the top of the canvas, and the other one was walking through the air, just like he was walking on the ground, and he went that way clear across the top of the canvas. Fortunately, neither one of the cats was hurt, but they didn't linger around the show after they came down.

"In a minute or two I walked along in front of Boliver, sort of gloating over what I had done. He watched me, and when I got pretty close, he made a swipe at me that would have killed me if I hadn't dodged it. He never did cease to bear malice against me. If I walked along on the outside of the canvas for years afterward, and my shadow fell across the sidewall, that elephant would make a charge and a swipe at it.

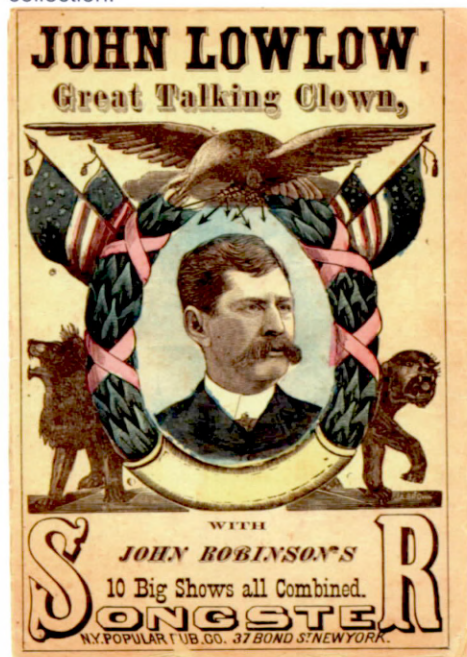
"Well, 'Colicky' told pa about the cats, and I got a licking in fact, there seldom was a day that I didn't.

"We had no candy and lemonade butchers in those days. 'Colicky' sold lemonade and candy while he wasn't in the ring, both outside and inside the canvas. Pa charged him nothing for the privilege, though it was a valuable one. And he made his lemonade from citric acid. But 'Colicky' was stingy, and I knew if I could hit him in the pocketbook I could hurt him worse than in any other way, and get a more satisfactory revenge for telling about the cats.

"Next day I borrowed a dollar from mother, went up the street and got an old Negro mammy to bake some gingerbread for me; and I also bought some real lemons.

"When I got back to the lot I made real lemonade, and set up my stand. I sold it for five cents a glass, and threw in a slice of

Songster for John Lowlow on the Robinson show about 1890. After singing and talking clowns went out of fashion, Lowlow stayed with the show as a press agent and later as purchasing agent. Circus World Museum collection.



gingerbread as lagniappe. 'Colicky' sold his acid juice for a dime, and gave away no gingerbread. "The result was that I had to buy all the lemons in town to supply the demand, and I cleared \$40 the first day. Next day I went into the business as a regular thing, and took all the trade away from 'Colicky.' He complained a lot about it, and finally sold out to me for \$30. Then I bought a horse and wagon, and in two months I had earned \$600.

Since that time I've been in business for myself.

"Of all the acts, however, that ever traveled with circuses in the United States, we were the first show to have a famous Negro bareback rider. He never had any other name than 'Negro Lewis,'" the Governor continued, though I couldn't see the connection between cats and Negroes at the time. But the conversation is here set down as it took place, because this is an interview, and nothing else.

"When I was an officer in the Federal Navy during the Civil War, we were ordered to put a check on the practice of guerrillas firing into our boats on the Mississippi River, by landing and burning plantation buildings.

"One day, near Island 63, we were fired upon. We stopped at the next plantation, and set the buildings afire. On our way back to the boats, I glanced into a burning cabin and saw a small colored boy asleep in the ashes in the fireplace. He had nothing on but a cotton bag, with a couple of holes cut into it to put his arms through, and one hole for his head. He was probably about three years old.

"I didn't want him to be burned so I took him in my arms, and shook him. He followed me all the way to the boat, and aboard it. There was some argument about keeping him; no one seemed to care anything about him. So I said I would take care of him. When I left the service and went back to the circus, I took Lewis as my servant. One winter I was training a Shetland pony for a little white boy to ride. A cold, nasty morning the boy failed to show up, so I wanted Lewis to run out into the training ring, and jump up on the pony. But at the start, do everything I could, by punishment, by fear, pleading and jollying, positively I couldn't get that boy to run. He didn't know how to run, and apparently I couldn't teach him. He was the most awkward thing I ever saw.

"I talked the matter over with some of the performers practicing there, and we called Lewis to us. We told him to take off his shoes, and we gave him a pair of pumps to put on. When he got them on we told him to run out and jump on the pony, but not to use too much exertion, because there were springs in the pumps, and they were so strong that if he used very much exertion he would go up through the roof of the ring barn, and probably never come down again.

"Well, we started the boy off and the pony off, and, by George, he went out to that pony like a deer, and grabbed the surcingle. Sure enough, he went clear over the pony, and landed on the outside of the ring, gave one bump, and landed against the side of the barn. After that we tried for five or six hours to get him to run again, but he wouldn't unless he had the pumps on. He believed there were springs in them. Of course, there were none, but the thought gave him confidence and his start at riding. Afterward he became one of the most skillful bareback riders that the circus world ever has known, and the only Negro rider I ever knew.

"Lewis stayed with my show for ten or twelve years. He went to Europe, and rode in some of the biggest circuses there. He was gone several years, and during that time a Hungarian baroness fell in love with him, and followed him all over the continent. But Lewis displayed unusual strength of character. He remained true to his wife, who was a colored minister's daughter living in Zanesville, Ohio.

"But he couldn't stand prosperity. At one time he was quite wealthy, and had several fine ring horses. Every circus in Europe wanted him. But he dissipated, and got rid of his wealth and his health. Then he returned to the United States. I found him in New York, a perfect wreck; not a dollar to his name, and in the last stages of consumption. I bought him some warm clothes, and paid his way to Zanesville, so he could be with his wife and his children. Within a few days after he got there he died." **BW**

# The Man Who Builds the Flying Trapeze

By A. Morton Smith

*Edward Van Wyck was a master fabricator of circus performers' equipment. The son of a St. Louis druggist, he learned to juggle as a young man, spending a number of years in minstrel shows, vaudeville, and circuses. Mechanically gifted, he often assisted other performers in designing, improving, and repairing props and rigging. He told friends he "just drifted" into supplying the circus industry with whatever gadgets were needed. He went into the equipment business full time in 1895, opening a small shop in Cincinnati.*

*As the following article illustrates he made apparatus for all kinds of acts. He also manufactured the finest juggling clubs of his time. Prior to his getting into the business juggling clubs varied wildly in quality. Performers often ordered twice the number of clubs needed, knowing that only about half of them would be usable in their acts. He made lighter, consistently well-balanced clubs, all weighing the same. He sold them for \$1.50 each. They provided a steady stream of orders over the years and by the time he stopped making clubs in 1942, he was a revered figure in juggling circles. He died in 1952. His motto was: "Everything for the juggler, anything for the circus."*

*For the last few decades Jake Conover of Xenia, Ohio, has filled Van Wyck's role in the circus business, supplying all manner of equipment to performers from bull hooks, to web ropes, trapeze bars and elephant tubs.*

*Some readers will remember A. Morton Smith, the author of this piece. A journalist all his life, he eventually became editor of the Gainesville (Texas) Register. He was best-known in the circus community as one of the founders of the Gainesville Community Circus. He was president of the Circus Fans Association in 1952-1953, a member of the Circus Historical Society, and sold circusiana for years up to his death in 1957. Over the years he supplemented his income as a free-lance writer, often writing for Hobbies magazine. This particular article appeared in Popular Science Monthly in October 1935. Fred D. Pfening III*

While stars of the circus are entertaining millions with sensational feats of daring on swaying perch poles, high wires, and the flying trapeze, a soft-spoken, middle-aged man sits at a work bench in his tiny shop in Cincinnati, Ohio, fashioning rigging on which these acrobats and aerialists will perform even more breath-taking and dare-devil stunts next season.

He is Edward Van Wyck, formerly a professional juggler. While he does not make all of the paraphernalia used by circus artists, he is the only man in America who devotes his time exclusively to the manufacture of circus rigging; at times he employs as many as six assistants.

Years ago, Ed Millette, an aerialist, had an idea for what he anticipated would be a sensational act. He would stand on his head on a wooden globe mounted on a high trapeze. The globe would revolve as the trapeze rotated in the opposite direction, creating an illusion of remarkable balancing skill. Fellow performers discouraged him. They said his idea was a pipe dream.

But Millette had trouped with Eddie Van Wyck, who, he recalled, made all of his own juggling equipment. So he went to Cincinnati, looked up Van Wyck, and explained his idea. "Give me two weeks to work it out," Van Wyck said. He tackled the job in his back-yard shop. Two weeks later, the equipment was finished and hung in a Cincinnati theater for a tryout. Millette was delighted, and took his novel rigging to New York where he joined the "greatest show on earth." His head-balancing act on the aerial globe was an outstanding feature of the circus season of 1908.

For twenty-seven years, Van Wyck has been working out just such farfetched ideas for circus and vaudeville acrobats, aerialists, tight-wire artists, and jugglers. He moved his shop from his back yard to a down-town building, because circus folk came to his home and awakened him at all hours of the night to consult him about new props.

There is nothing ostentatious about Van Wyck's shop. It occupies a room twenty-three by twenty-eight feet on the ground floor of a two-story brick building. His name in black letters on the glass panel of the front door is the only identification. There is no machinery peculiar to his trade, except scores of molds for casting metal pieces used in rigging, which he has designed and constructed by hand as needed. Otherwise, he uses standard lathes, drill presses, and power saws.

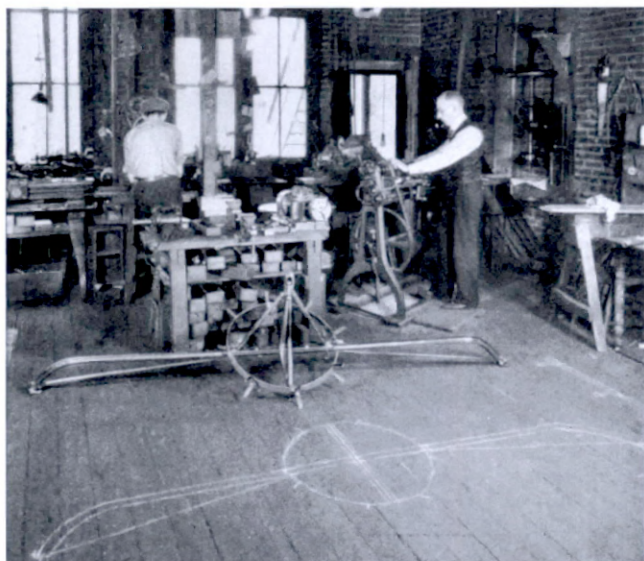
Not all of his customers come to his shop to discuss their plans with him. Often they write or telegraph or cable from such far-away cities as Moscow, Bombay, Capetown, or San Francisco.

When a circus performer wants a new piece of equipment and its use is explained in detail to Van Wyck, he sketches it on paper to arrive at the proper dimensions and to determine the materials to be used. He has 6,000 sketches of every conceivable type of rigging filed alphabetically by the names of the troupes or individuals for whom they have been made. If he gets a rush order for replacement of some piece of equipment, his files afford him a quick reference for details.

"There are two things about the construction of circus properties that must always be borne in mind," Van Wyck told me. "One is that equipment must be built

A young Edward Van Wyck appeared in the July 4, 1908 *Billboard*. Image courtesy Mark Schmitt, Milner Library, Illinois State University.





Van Wyck on right in his small shop. Recently-completed rigging for a two-person iron jaw act in photo's center. In front of it is a chalk drawing for the iron jaw equipment used in fabrication. Photo from article.

of the lightest possible materials without sacrificing strength and durability. The other is that most rigging must be constructed in sections or to fold so that it can be dismantled and packed in small property boxes."

When Van Wyck has completed a sketch of a piece of equipment, he makes a second drawing, this time with crayon on the floor of his shop, reproducing the rigging full size. By this process, any impractical details not discernible on the paper sketch are revealed and he can check the dimensions and compare the equipment he is building with the floor sketch as he proceeds with his work.

"For instance," he said, "I once received an order from a well-known vaudeville comedian for a Japanese foot-juggling barrel six feet high. These barrels are usually thirty inches high. But the actor conceived the idea that a large barrel juggled on his feet would be a good novelty. I drew the barrel to scale on paper and then sketched it with crayon on the floor. I discovered its circumference in the center would be so great that I would not be able to move it through the door of the shop when I had completed it!

"I decided to build it in the hallway adjacent to the shop, but at the same time I wrote to the actor and suggested that he draw a full-size sketch of the barrel just as I had done, using the dimensions I had prepared. I had the barrel about half done when I received a telegram from him to reduce the height from six to five feet. It had not occurred to him, until he saw the dimensions drawn to scale, just how immense and unwieldy that barrel would have been."

Construction of a foot-juggling barrel involves a process that reverses the customary procedure in barrel making. The hoops are placed inside instead of outside the barrel. There are fifty-five basswood staves, held together with 650 tiny nails. The barrel is covered inside and out with canvas, glued to the surface to reduce the hazard of breakage. The completed barrel weighs only one third as much as an ordinary barrel of the same size.

Scarcely a week passes without Van Wyck being called upon to make some piece of equipment entirely different from anything he has made before. A German cannon-ball juggler broke a steel ball, made for him in the Krupp munitions works, soon after arriving in New York for an American tour. So he gathered up the pieces, shipped them to Van Wyck, and instructed him to duplicate the ball.

Before the cannon ball had been completed, Van Wyck received a telegram from Hollywood asking him to make six sets of tiny wooden shoes for a troupe of dancing monkeys appearing in a motion picture. And a few days later, a man brought a trained dog to the shop and explained that he wanted a small metal cup in which the dog could put its four feet, the base to be heavy enough that the canine might maintain its balance in such a position.

All of these are commonplace tasks for the circus technician. But there are intricate problems that challenge his inventive genius and mechanical ingenuity. Circuses frequently devise something new in aerial rigging—and expect him to provide it.

It was Van Wyck who designed the loop-the-loop trapeze, now a feature of many circuses. An ordinary trapeze bar is attached to the supporting crane bar with rigid, steel-tubing uprights as substitutes for rope. The joints are made with double ball bearings in brass housings. The performer stands on the trapeze bar, swings backward and forward to obtain enough momentum to revolve swiftly around the crane bar, and the result is a thrilling aerial spectacle.

Once a circus girl, learning to propel and control the revolutions of a loop-the-loop trapeze, fell from the top of the tent and was killed. Her feet had slipped from the bar and her hands had lost their grip. So Van Wyck set about to provide a safety device against such accidents. The result was a pair of keys to be attached to the soles of the performer's shoes. When he mounts the trapeze, the keys slip into slots in the trapeze bar and lock so that there is little possibility of a fall.

The safety of circus performers has been as much Van Wyck's concern as the making of intricate equipment on which the dare-devils risk their lives. He introduced the use of steel tubing for the framework and uprights of horizontal bars, flying-return rigging, high-diving towers, and various other paraphernalia, replacing the more cumbersome and less dependable iron pipe which show people had traditionally used.

For the "iron-jaw" or teeth act, Van Wyck conceived the idea of a rigging on which two or three persons might hang simultaneously by their teeth and revolve for a "human butterfly" effect. And he has originated variations of the act.

His latest contribution to the circus art is an aerial contrivance so constructed that three women perform on swinging ladders which revolve around a stationary trapeze on which a fourth performer goes through a routine of acrobatic feats.

Strangely enough, most of the Japanese perch poles used by performers from the Orient are made in Van Wyck's shop. So are the Roman ladders used by Italian equilibrists, the juggling guns of French Zouaves, the bounding ropes of East Indian acrobats, and the Australian boomerang-throwers' weapons.

A Japanese acrobatic troupe came to Van Wyck's shop in Cincinnati with an order for equipment to be used in their act. "I told them I was too busy to make their rigging," Van Wyck said. "Then they asked permission to use my machinery to make their own props and I readily agreed. They set to work, and I have never seen

**WANTED**

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Can use you if experienced and can train horses to do everything. Read King Brothers' ad on page —.

**SIDE SHOW MAGICIANS**

I am headquarters for the Card Tricks, Magic Books and Shun you sell. Send 10c for a set of samples. None free. CHAS. LEE, 145 East 23d St., New York.

Van Wyck took this cleverly worded ad in the March 21, 1925 *Billboard*, just above ads looking for a horse trainer and selling magic booklets.

better craftsmen. Further every time they left a pile of steel filings or sawdust on the floor, they stopped work to sweep up the mess."

Because he has been a performer himself Van Wyck understands thoroughly the individual problems of circus people. That is why they come to him from all parts of the world, confident of his ability to provide what they need. He knows that certain rigging must be perfectly balanced or it will be useless for the purpose desired. He knows where the greatest strain is exerted on various kinds of apparatus. And he never forgets that circus equipment must be attractive in appearance as well as serviceable.

"Many people think," he said, "that there is a trick to every circus act—that equipment is so constructed as to make it easy for a performer to do apparently difficult feats. Unfortunately, perhaps, circus rigging cannot be made like a magician's properties."

It is true, he explained, that circus equipment is built to aid a performer in doing his particular type of act. Few are the artists, however, who do not risk their lives every time they mount their



Con Colleano, shown here in an iconic Harry Atwell photo, purchased his tight wire and rigging from Van Wyck. Harry Atwell negatives, Circus World Museum collection.

rigging. A trapeze bar on which an aerial performer does heel-and-toe catches, for instance, has ornamental balls on the ends of the bar, which are loaded to make the bar swing evenly and permit better balance than on an ordinary trapeze. The artist also wears specially made shoes with padded humps built up behind each heel—but Van Wyck points out that a half-inch pad is not a very substantial safety device when a performer does a twisting somersault out of a trapeze to catch by his heels.

One of the most spectacular acts in the circus program is that of the tight-wire artist. Yet a tight wire is about the simplest piece of equipment made in the shop. Van Wyck constructs all of the wires used by Con Colleano, the Australian artist, who is the only person who has ever accomplished a forward somersault on the steel strand.

When Colleano needs a new wire, Van Wyck selects a strand of one-fourth-inch English steel, thirty-seven feet long and tested to bear the weight of four persons. Each end of the wire is bent around a cast-iron eyelet, triangular in shape and cast in one of the manufacturer's homemade molds. The loop around the eyelet is made fast by binding with fine copper wire which is solidified by cold soldering, and the finished product is ready for the arena.

"Cold soldering is necessary to prevent the drawing of the temper from the steel," Van Wyck explains. "This is important because, if the wire was heated, it would be subject to crystallization, which changes the finest steel into mere pot metal. Crystallization in metals is the greatest menace to the circus performer."

The life of a tight wire depends upon the strain to which it is subjected. Colleano discards his wires every six months because of the strain of his bounding on the strands to obtain momentum for his mid-air revolutions. "On the other hand," Van Wyck added, "a tight-wire walker came to my shop the other day and boasted that he was still using a wire I made for him seventeen years ago."

"You're crazy to risk your life on that wire, I told him. I explained

the danger of crystallization and he said he had never thought of it. So he ordered a new wire."

And that, Van Wyck said with a wry smile, is one of the drawbacks of his business. He makes equipment so durable that his products rarely wear out. The revolving globe on the spinning trapeze, which he made for Ed Millette more than a quarter of a century ago as one of his first contributions to the circus, is still being used every day by Ira Millette, who succeeded his father in the head-balancing act.

About the most difficult circus property to make, in Van Wyck's opinion, is a rolling globe. Such a globe, a perfect, hollow sphere of white pine, is usually twenty-seven to thirty-six inches in diameter. The performer balances on the curved surface, rolling the globe up and down inclines, while doing other feats with his hands, such as juggling or hand-to-hand balancing with a partner.

A globe is constructed in two sections, fashioned inside and outside on a lathe and the interior covered with canvas, glued to the surface. The two sections are glued together and the completed globe thoroughly sanded and painted in gay circus colors. Two weeks of exacting work are required to turn one out.

Increasing use of cleverly contrived mechanical devices to aid in the performance of sensational feats is predicted by Van Wyck as he looks into the future of the circus. He points out that gymnasts in almost every field of ground and aerial acrobatic work have achieved the heights of mere physical strength, endurance, and agility.

Two of the most sensational acts of the modern circus, he remarked, were made possible only through mechanical devices. One is the shooting of two men, one after another, from a gigantic cannon by the use of compressed air. Another is the feat of a French woman who leaps from a platform high in the tent to a trapeze which breaks, plunging her toward the ground. Wires attached to her ankles and to springs on the high platform from which she leaps, snap her back into the air to swing pendulum fashion, leaving the audience gasping.

Even the clowns, who once depended solely upon comic songs and later upon pantomime for laugh-provoking effects, have turned to mechanical contrivances. The driverless automobile which cavorts on the hippodrome track to the delight of the kiddies, and trick bicycles which expand and shrink in size as the comedian pedals, are among the ingenious devices that are seen in the modern circus.

The ingenuity of the circus mechanic is cast in the big unseen role of the thrilling acts of today. **BW**



Van Wyck runs a small lathe to put the final touches on a bronze bearing housing for a loop-the-loop trapeze. Photo from article.

# PETE CRISTIANI REMEMBERS—PART IV

## Cristiani Family, Floyd King Rake in Big Bucks, But Success Leads to Break-up, Different Paths

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**P**ete Cristiani insists it wasn't his fault that the son of a small-town Canadian mayor suffered a broken jaw on the King Bros.-Cristiani Circus midway in the summer of 1953. Rather it was a candy butcher who nailed the teenage punk and two buddies as they were trying to steal bottled Cokes from the back end of the concessions semi, Cristiani contends.



Likenesses of Floyd King and Lucio Cristiani appeared on King-Cristiani passes. King's fondness for pink motifs is reflected in the ticket's color. Pfening Archives.

Nonetheless, it was Pete whom the banged-up troublemaker fingered, and it was Pete who had to flee the Canadian Royal Mounties and hightail it back across the border to escape the vengeful mayor's wrath.

The unpublicized incident spoiled what should have been a pleasant two-month outing in the Dominion for Papa and Momma Cristiani and their ten children. The entire family was touring as a unit for the first time since 1942, when their halcyon days on the Greatest Show on Earth came to a close.

Even though he managed to get the assault charges dropped, Pete and wife Norma and their two-year-old son, Tony, remained in Quincy, Illinois, until the King-Cristiani outfit re-entered the U.S. in Maine.

The youth's jawbone would heal. Not so the rumored feuding between the family and their partner of the past five seasons. Like a simmering volcano, their behind-the-scenes discontent erupted publicly in late 1953. The story topped *The Billboard's* Outdoor section in its December 19 edition: "MACON, Ga., Dec. 12—The partnership between Floyd King and Lucio Cristiani was dissolved here Wednesday, (9), ending a set-up which operated King Bros. Circus from 1949 and which made the King Bros. & Cristiani Circus the biggest money-maker among outdoor circuses in 1953.

"Arnold Maley, treasurer, will be associated with Floyd King in ownership and operation of King Bros. Circus in 1954.

"Cristiani, head of the large family of performers, will not be identified with any circus in 1954, according to present plans. . . ."

An ad in the same *Billboard* confirmed Floyd King's intentions: "King Bros. Circus. Want for 1954 Season. Big Show Performers: Riding Act, High Wire, Teeterboard Troupe, Flying Act . . . Twenty Clowns . . . Girls for Ladders, Web, Iron Jaw and Menage . . . Season Opens April 10."

Contrary to his claims, Lucio Cristiani had been entertaining a proposal to team up with promoter Robert "Big Bob" Stevens to play ballparks the coming season, Pete said in an early-2011 interview from his home in Sarasota, Florida. Pete—youngest of the six Cristiani brothers—dissented to the arrangement, to no avail. He reminded the clan of his less-than-satisfactory dealings with Stevens in reclaiming four elephants from him in 1948.

But with the blessings of the remainder of the family (minus Chita and Cosseta, who returned to nightclub dates with the Zerbini troupe), Lucio inked a deal that installed Big Bob as general agent for the new Bailey Bros.-Cristiani Circus. This partnership endured through two seasons of mostly open-air performances, including the historic Alaskan tour in the summer of 1954. When that pact fell apart, the family built its own Cristiani Bros. Circus in 1956.

Pete's role on the new circus—managing concessions—was the same as it had been since he rejoined his family on King Bros. in 1951. His brothers had

The old master Roland Butler designed the 1953 King-Cristiani program cover. Milner Library collection, Illinois State University.



denied him that post at the end of the family's first year as partners on the King show. His return to the fold, after spending the 1950 season in virtual exile on the Dailey Bros. Circus, enabled the Cristianis to keep even more of the money that rolled into the coffers of an already prosperous enterprise.

In early 1951 Pete pulled into the King winter quarters at Macon, Georgia, with the kind of baggage that was welcome on any circus: a performing wife and five young elephants. In June 1950 Pete's father-in-law, Ben Davenport, had given away not only his daughter Norma in marriage but also, as a wedding gift, the elephant quintet—Norma, Mary, Maud, Conti and Bessie.

At the outset of the 1951 tour, the newlyweds took up residence in a makeshift apartment in the front of the elephant semi-trailer, also a gift from Davenport. This arrangement was quite a comedown for Norma, who had enjoyed the relative luxury of the family's private rail coach and the services of a porter and maid since Dailey Bros. became a rail show in 1944.

On her parents' circus, "I had a stateroom, the pie car where you could get sandwiches or anything you wanted at night," Norma told the writer in a 2008 interview. "You'd go to bed, and you'd wake up in the next town in the morning.

"This was on the train show. Then we got on the truck show. We didn't have a bathroom or shower in our truck. And I was pregnant" with the couple's first child, which meant she would not be able to work the Norma Cristiani elephants under the big top.

With the new arrivals, the circus was able to boast that its elephant herd had grown to an even dozen, the remainder being owned by Pete's oldest brother Oscar. In fact, the whole circus had increased in size and scope, fueled by hefty profits from the 1950 tour of four Canadian provinces and 18 states, covering 14,400 miles. The Cristianis family (minus Pete) also reaped financial benefits from post-season Shrine engagements in New Orleans and Minneapolis.

The signings of human cannonball Hugo Zacchini, juggler Maximo Truzzi and aerialist Manuel Barrigan enhanced the 1951 performance roster. Clown alley, headed by Brownie Gudath, boasted 14 merrymakers, including long-time Cristianis dwarf clown, Bagonghi Gallizziola. Another family favorite, horse groom Ettore Faccini, was in charge of ring stock. Band leader Lee Hinckley hoped to expand his entourage to 15. Col. Harry Thomas joined as ringmaster after closing a series of winter dates for producer Orrin Davenport.

A new big top from U.S. Tent & Awning boosted the seating capacity to 3,000, providing an additional 400 chairs in the reserves and 800 seats in the blues, as reported in the March 31 *Billboard*. The menagerie tent also loomed larger with the insertion of a 30-foot middle section. It now was able to accommodate a larger va-

Menagerie canvas trailer and semi at the Macon, Georgia fairgrounds in 1952 or 1953. King-Cristiani wintered there as had the Sparks show years earlier. Pfening Archives.



King-Cristiani band sleeper, once a city bus, at Trenton, New Jersey, August 22, 1953. John Van Matre photo, Pfening Archives.

riety of cage animals, which were noticeably lacking during the previous season.

C.H. Thompson managed the side show, with Tommy Hart and Charlie Roark as ticket sellers.

Not to be outdone in the midway makeover, Pete Cristiani enlarged and spruced up concession operations. He recalled contacting a Coca Cola rep for up-front money to build new concession stands. "This is my first year," he told the soft-drink salesman, "and I'd like to have some nice flashy stands so I can better represent Coke." The bottler forked over \$2,500 for the task enabling Pete to build four new joints.

In addition, he spent \$5,000 to buy a Wells Fargo trailer which he converted into a diner mounted on a straight job truck, replacing the previous season's canvas eatery. He also purchased a new tractor for the concessions wagon.

He hired additional candy butchers and enlarged the stock of novelties, giving circus-goers more opportunities to buy snow cones, candied apples and floss during performances and as they wandered around the show grounds. Having advertised for experienced hands by name in the March 17 *Billboard*, Pete scored the services of J. H. Bering on the No. 1 stand; Warren Ratz on candy floss (paired with Pete's best friend Dave Budd, who was now married to Pete's younger sister Corky); Hi Hi Williams, apple and snow cone stand; John B. Williams (former minstrel band leader on the Dailey Bros. sideshow), lunch stand; Jack "Frenchie" Rubin, lunch car; Al Good-year and "Camel" Nordeen, novelties; and—to work the seats during performances—Stanley Pollack, Tony Dales, Murray "Whitey" Whited, B. C. "Blackie" Morie, Danny Baker and Emil Drugie.

Pete said he was able to hire some of the best butchers on the circuit because he promised them they could keep a third of their respective gross sales; other shows were paying concessionaires 25 percent of sales. Even taking into consideration the additional third that Pete held back for his services, the remainder that went to the show's kitty "was more than they ever got before," he said.

As a result, "we had a big year on concessions. Floyd King never dreamed that concessions could draw as much as they did. He was amazed that I kept plenty of help." Another benefit to the circus, Pete noted, was the availability of butchers to drive show trucks on jumps between towns. "I provided 12 to 14 drivers during the season," he pointed out. Those who remained for the entire tour received a \$250 bonus from Cristianis for their efforts behind the wheel.

One of Floyd King's favorite midway features—grift—was on the way out, replaced by sponsored dates, Cristianis pointed out.



King-Cristiani hippo den at Macon winter quarters 1952 and 1953. Pfening Archives.

However, King kept his ding show in the circus front yard, where towners were invited to walk through a "free" exhibition of wild animals, only to be encouraged by one of King's henchmen to throw at least a quarter into a collection can as they exited.

King noted in the February 24 *Billboard* that "last year we played a number of engagements under auspices before we entered Canada. It was an experiment and it worked well. In a business where operating costs have almost doubled during the past several years, one has to consider sale factors." Lucio Cristiani concurred, adding that the experiment demonstrated the need for the circus to dispatch promotion crews further ahead of the show than the original trial.

King, who continued his invaluable services in routing and promoting the show, brought in a veteran publicist, Ora O. Parks, to boost the circus up front. Mindful of the widespread heat that Dailey Bros. stirred up in 1950, King also decided to rest the Canadian route of the past two seasons and concentrate on U.S. dates. This was a strategy which, had several other circus owners followed suit, would have helped them avoid lackluster results in the Dominion in 1951.

As its April 7 opener in Macon approached, the King outfit had positioned itself as a major contender. With the Clyde Beatty Circus playing mostly in the West, Ringling-Barnum was the only other railer out the entire season. The Big One opened at the Garden in New York City. Cole Bros. didn't make it past its Chicago Stadium opening engagement (April 20-May 6), leaving most of its 30 rail cars sitting idle in Peru, Indiana. Mills Bros. provided the only other significant challenge along the King route. Ben Davenport, late of the Dailey Bros., retooled for the 1951 tour under the Campa Bros. Circus title, utilizing talent from that Mexican family. Traveling on 34 trucks, with many former rail wagons converted for highway use, it was still a big show.

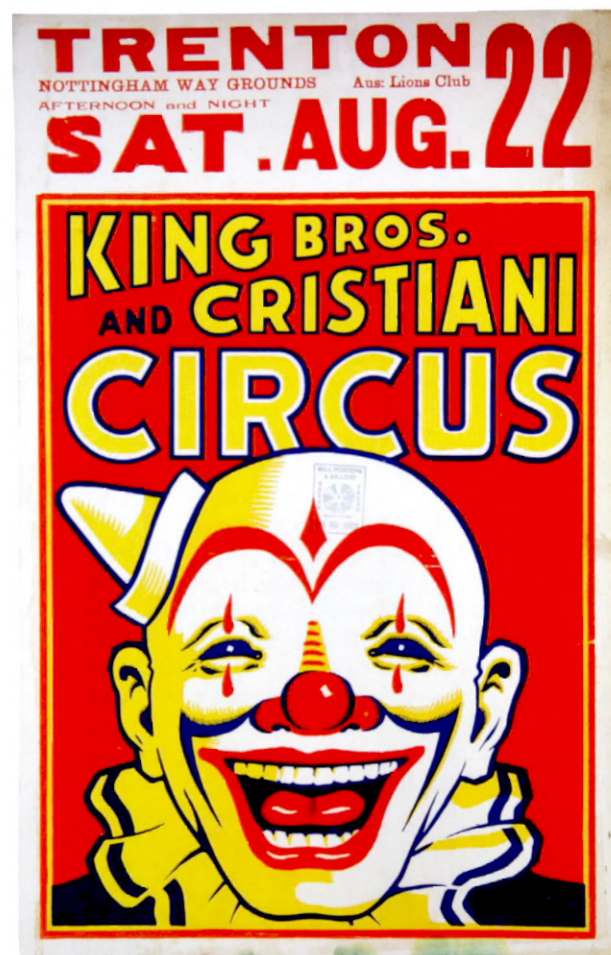
Heavy rain did not deter the locals from streaming into King Bros.' new big top for the three maiden performances at winter-quarters under sponsorship of Macon Elks Club. Making their King debut, besides Zacchini, were the Sabatini casting act and the Del Moral Troupe, who offered several aerial routines. The circus hit the road on a reported 35 trucks, initially tackling the rough, mountainous roads of Virginia, West Virginia and Kentucky to entertain miners and their families in the prosperous coal towns.

An early-season ruckus involved billing crews of King and Biller Bros., the latter attempting to regain its footing after shrinking receipts forced it to shorten its 1950 route. According to the May 5 *Billboard* account, two Billers Bros. drivers were arrested at Clifton Forge, Virginia, on April 13, and jailed for assaulting two King Bros. drivers. The opposition crew also was accused of damaging two King trucks. "The altercation took place in front of

the courthouse," *Billboard* reported, "and was witnessed by county officers. The billing war began several days ago, with Biller coming in ahead of King at about six spots. . . . William Cowan, Biller Bros. legal adjuster, and Dave Fineman, King legal adjuster, settled differences between the two shows, and Floyd King said his show would make no charges."

Following a particularly harrowing experience in the West-by-God-Virginia mountains, Norma Cristiani called it quits, as she recalled in a 2008 interview with the author: "I told Pete, 'I've got to call my mother. I've got to go home. I can't do this anymore because I'm going to lose the baby if I keep fooling around like this.' And I'll tell you why: I have Rh negative blood. It's very rare, and if I needed a blood transfusion [during delivery], there might not be a hospital nearby."

Mrs. Cristiani gave birth to Tony on July 7, 1951, at Quincy, Il-



King Bros. and Cristiani Circus window card for Trenton, New Jersey engagement, August 22, 1953. Note stamp on clown's forehead certifying it was posted by a union billposter. Pfening Archives.

linois, with her mother Eva Billings Davenport (the former Princess Lola of medicine show notoriety), providing maternity care. Pete hopped a plane to Illinois and was away from the show for a week to be with his wife and their first offspring.

Meanwhile, King Bros. was scoring big houses despite the up-and-down jumps and seemingly unrelenting rain. Its daily noontime downtown mini-parade, another Floyd King promotional touch that season, regularly drew appreciative crowds to cheer the sights,



Pete Cristiani working concessions on his family's circus in 1958. Fred Pfening, Jr. photo, Pfening Archives.

sounds and smells of 13 elephants and a truck-drawn air calliope.

Cumberland, Maryland, welcomed the circus with four performances on May 14. Two shows were turnaways the next day in Weston, West Virginia, and two more over-capacity performances were reported on May 17 at Fairmount. On May 23, at Duquesne, Pennsylvania, the *Billboard* correspondent reported (June 2) that "King Bros. Circus was the first circus to play here since 1913 and played to a three-quarter matinee plus a turnaway at night. . . . Ticket sales were stopped after 1,200 persons were on the straw."

King Bros. was not alone in attracting crowds. Noting that circus business was booming in all sections of the country, *Billboard* scribe Tom Parkinson revealed in the June 23 issue that Howard Y. Bary was planning to take out a three-car walk-through animal show on rails, and that Big Bob Stevens was reviving his old Bailey Bros. show.

Clyde Beatty was rumored to be considering a tour of Alaska, utilizing a combination of ocean-going barges and rails, coinciding with a three-month tour of Canada. It didn't materialize. Kelly-Miller played a Sunday matinee at Antlers, Oklahoma, before an impressive 4,000 patrons to kick off its 1951 season on April 23.

King Bros. used the cash rolling in to continue modernizing the show, taking on three new trucks in early May, as well as a new menagerie and sideshow tent, and a spool truck for the big top. Turnaway audiences were the rule, not the exception, as the circus blazed through a series of New England summer dates. *Billboard's* "Under the Marquee" column on July 28 noted that "King Bros. Circus registered outstanding press breaks in Maine, with eight-column picture spreads across the front pages at Portland, Bangor and Waterville. . . . Ora O. Parks, King press rep, was the subject of a story in the Portland Evening Express July 2."

Though the King brand was strong enough to pull capacity crowds through the front door, the Cristianis—and their kin through marriage—continued to dominate the performance. For example, Col. Harry Thomas, in his August 4 *Billboard* "Dressing Room Gossip" column, reported that "Antoinette Cristiani is working in the baby elephant display, as well as riding line-up. Lucio Cristiani doubled in the trampoline act for Bagonghi, while the latter was ill. . . . Wardrobe for the boys in the leaps is flashy. The leapers are

Tommy Pair, Red Dingler, Mogadore (Paul) Cristiani and Freddie Canestrelli, who does the featured leap over five elephants." In an earlier column (July 14), he told of Pete Cristiani and Steve Fanning "breaking baby bulls to a new routine," and of "Hugo Zacchini painting banners in his newly constructed studio on wheels."

Bob Stevens was able to book his Bailey Bros. on a string of Pennsylvania dates, thanks to his new partner, Henry Vonderheid, who had purchased the assets of Burling Bros. in May. Primary acts on the 16-truck show were Dolly Jacobs' elephants, Freddie Vonderheid on trapeze and Shirley Stevens on web and ladders. Alas, on August 18, "Bob Stevens has informed The *Billboard* that he has sold his interest in Bailey Bros. Circus to his partner. . . . who will close it tomorrow. Vonderheid will play fairs with the acts."

The downsized Biller Bros. encountered mostly poor business in its return outing to Canada, finally giving up its presence as a going concern and retreating to its Memphis fairgrounds quarters in early October. "Show had been wildcatting for several days, using no advance and heralding performances only with a loudspeaker car," the October 20 *Billboard* disclosed in reporting the final stand at Clarendon, Arkansas.

Just the opposite results were good fortune for the King-Cristiani group. Due largely to Floyd King's impeccable timing for routing into the South, the show reaped the benefits of bountiful tobacco and cotton crops. King Bros. also beat Ringling-Barnum to the punch in most competitive cities below the Mason-Dixon Line.

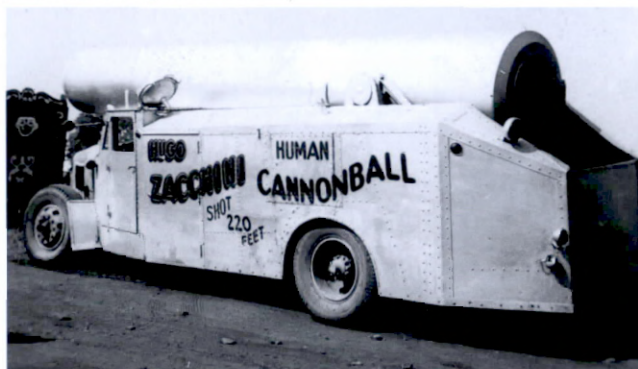
At Columbia, South Carolina, for example, King staged two matinees and two evening performances on September 21 behind the Columbia Jaycees' advance sale of 7,000 tickets. The Big One, which had been running wait ads, was forced to cancel its stand four days later because of a football game at the state fair.

At an October 1 engagement at Moultrie, Georgia, "Kiwanis Club auspices put enthusiastic audiences in the seats," stated *Billboard* on October 13, and "phenomenal attendance for the King concert was reported at Eastman, Georgia, Friday (September 28). . . . The after-show line-up includes Pierce Indian Duo, Cowboy Jimmie Karro, Wrestler Duke Dekeno and Sgt. Red Wright, judo expert, with Col. Harry Thomas directing."

At that point King proclaimed that as a result of big business in both New England and the South, the circus would remain on the road through Thanksgiving. As if to answer this taunt, Ringling-Barnum set up its tented city in the Macon Central City Park, site of the King Bros. winterquarters on October 10.

In anticipation of the King Bros. homecoming on Sunday, November 25 following its season finale at Sandersville, Georgia, the Macon city council expanded the circus's quarters. Floyd King

The Hugo Zacchini cannon was a feature on King-Cristiani, Trenton, New Jersey, August 22, 1953. John Van Matre photo, Pfening Archives.



proudly highlighted the stats for the 1951 tour: 11,495 miles in 20 states over 33 weeks—with more than 200 playing days without missing a single performance and requiring 51 extra shows to accommodate overflow crowds.

Eschewing the traditional early winter Shrine and Police dates, most of the Cristiani family settled in at winterquarters—the same site used earlier by Sun Bros., Sparks and Downie Bros. circuses. Troupe leader Lucio and wife June used part of his lavish earnings to book an eight-week European tour with Tony Diano, who had placed some of his animals on the show for the past two seasons. Ostensibly, the purpose of the trip was scout the continent for new acts. Cristiani returned stateside so he could fulfill the Minneapolis Shrine commitment with his family from February 28 to March 8, 1952.

Pete decamped in Sarasota with wife Norma and their infant son. He advertised the availability of the Norma Cristiani elephants to fill winter dates. He later hired ex-Dailey elephant trainer Rex Williams to work the five bulls and his wife Barbara Williams to present them on Tom Packs engagements.

Norma's father, Ben Davenport, closed Campa Bros. a little short of the scheduled season finale. By mid-December he was back in the hunt for towners' offerings. He inked a deal to field a new show with two cohorts—former general agent Bill Moore and Bert Seibert, the latter being same Cadillac distributor who had posted bail for the circus owner in the aftermath of a raid on the Dailey pie car in Wisconsin in 1950. Davenport bought the Wallace Bros. title from the estate of the late Ray W. Rogers and repainted wagons to reflect the new name for the 1952 outing.

The King show also got a makeover for 1952; its title was expanded to King Bros. & Cristiani Combined Circus. An overabundance of paper with the King title was a factor in delaying the addition of the Cristiani name until that time, explained Pete Cristiani.

Capitalizing on the success of his downtown elephant jaunts of the previous tour, Floyd King announced the circus would stage a complete circus parade in most towns along the 1952 route. It was to be the first, he said, since both Cole Bros. and Parker and Watts provided such spectacles in 1939.

The inaugural parade at Macon on April 5 saw the return of an old-fashioned steam calliope, played by Bud Geiss. The 19-unit, quarter-mile pageant also showcased the No. 1 and 2 bands, as well as side show and clown bands, along with a mounted horse patrol, elephants, camels and zebras. Special wagons built for the parade were hauled separately between towns.

The performance line-up remained relatively stable. A new big top seated some 500 fewer patrons than in 1951.

After Oscar Cristiani's lead elephant, Christy, suffered a cut foot in the ring and temporarily sidelined that act, "Pete and Norma Cristiani immediately came to the rescue with their herd of baby elephants," wrote Thomas in his July 19 *Billboard* column, "and altho she has not worked for over a year, Norma did a swell job of handling the little bulls" for several days. At other times, Norma was at her husband's side in the money-making concession operations.

Although the parade strategy proved its merit, other factors, including rain and cold temperatures, were responsible for shorter ticket window lines at some locations. At Frederick, Maryland, on August 14, "the parade attracted an unusually good turnout but apprehensive parents kept their children at home in the afternoon because of polio, and the circus had a one-quarter crowd," reported the August 30 *Billboard* August 30.

The parade drew a crowd estimated at 20,000 in Concord, North Carolina, and another 35,000 turned out at St. Petersburg, Florida, for the first street parade there in two decades.



The King-Cristiani Circus presented a remarkably good street parade in 1953. Show here is the big show band atop bandwagon. Pfening Archives.

After covering most of the same New England, Mid-Atlantic and Southern States as in the 1951 tour, Floyd King was once again able to declare the 1952 season "highly successful" as the circus fleet made the home run to winterquarters following two jammed performances in Hawkinsville, Georgia, on November 25. As reported in *Billboard*'s December 22 edition: "Show returned larger than it left, having bought a polar bear, several other menagerie animals and five motor units on the road. . . .

"Show had a tour of 235 days and for the second consecutive year did not miss a performance. No Sunday date was played, which made the playing season 201 days. Unlike other seasons, only one two-day stand was played, Paterson, New Jersey, May 23-24. Total mileage was 11,124.

"The return of the parade was hailed as one of the factors for the big season but next season it will be advertised from 11:30 a.m. instead of 11 o'clock. 'With lots so far out, it is almost impossible to get the parade in the business district by 11 o'clock,' Floyd King said. 'We plan many additional floats, especially horse-drawn parade wagons.'"

Ben Davenport took a new tack in 1953, introducing a new title for the third consecutive season. Putting the Wallace Bros. ban-



The 1953 King-Cristiani parade featured elephants and more elephant. Note that banner salesman had a good day as at least the last six bulls in line have advertising signs on their sides. Pfening Archives.

ner in storage, he announced on February 10 that he had sold all of his show property to Tony Diano. According to the February 21 *Billboard*, Davenport was retained as general manager. He also kept the winterquarters property at Gonzales. An ad in the same edition, signed by secretary Harry Hammond, sought show folks in all departments for the April 4 opener on the Davenport-owned



The old Gentry Bros. steam calliope concluded the 1953 King-Cristiani parade. In front of elephants is the Zacchini cannon. Pfening Archives.

showgrounds. This arrangement would fall apart in mid-season, at which time Davenport resumed ownership and promoted his circus as Wallace Bros. for the remainder of 1953.

Farther up the road in North Texas, Bob Stevens was repositioning his Bailey Bros. Circus as an outdoor unit of Shrine producer Gil Gray at the latter's winter quarters in Gainesville. March 30 was set for the season's kick off in Kilgore, Texas.

"About 35 towns, mostly in Wisconsin and Minnesota, have been signed," stated the March 14 *Billboard*. "Seven phone crews have been working since January 1. . . .

"The show will play in front of grandstands, in buildings and parks, stadiums and rodeo grounds. . . . It will carry six poles for rigging, three rings and platform, cookhouse, sleeper, prop and concession trucks. . . ."

Stevens and his new outdoor format were to figure prominently in the Cristiani family's future plans.

King Bros., with plenty of bombast in keeping with a show of its continually expanding size, initiated its 1953 season at Macon under police auspices with a reported record advance take. Elmer Yates's phone room alone contributed \$7,000 in underprivileged children ticket sales, known in the business as UPCs.

The talent line-up now included the so-called little Cristianis—Chita and Cosetta Cristiani and their Zerbini-Cristiani husbands were part of a five-person troupe; the Rodry Brothers' trapeze routine from Ringling-Barnum, and a Digger Pugh troupe of 14 Wal-laby showgirls from England.

Special paper was used to tout a new sideshow attraction, Johann K. Peterssen, "the Viking Giant." Tommy Hart was promoted to sideshow manager.

"Always a strong biller," pointed out *Billboard* on April 4, "the King-Cristiani org this year will outdo former efforts, having more than 40 designs of four-color pictorial paper. The show uses a mailing list for heralds, as well as house-to house distribution of the show stand."

Another Floyd King promotion, a daily balloon ascension, never really got off the ground due to high winds in its initial attempts. It was dumped early on.

The *Billboard's* Tom Parkinson put his finger on an ever-growing problem that concerned Lucio Cristiani for most of the show's return to Canada. In his April 11 column, he observed, "The show, with a nut roughly equal to that of a 20-car (rail) outfit of 1929, carries 51 pieces of rolling stock, plus house trailers and advance

trucks. . . . A large percentage of the staff and performing personnel stops in hotels regularly."

Conversion to a train circus would eliminate some of those worries, Lucio was asserting more strongly. But King was content to stick with overland pathways of concrete, despite mounting repair bills on the fleet and the unrelenting fatigue experienced by the drivers—some of whom also were performers.

The show's staff remained fairly stable, with Ralph Clawson having assumed the legal adjuster's duties during the previous season. Pete Cristiani's concessionaires included Al Dennis, Ellis Feifer, Dick Thomas, Red Moran, Roy Jones, Frenchie Moore, Iowa Farrington, Michael J. (Shaky Mike) Glenfriddo, Blackie O'Malley, B. H. Huddleston, Albert Powell, Warren Ratz, Larry Davis and Danny Craig.

It was Craig, contended Pete, who was responsible for his flight from Canada only two stops into the show's two-month schedule north of the border.

Clearing customs late Saturday night, May 30, after playing two near-capacity houses on the U.S. side of Niagara Falls, the show required three performances to take care of crowds at St. Catherine, Ontario, on June 1. Pete recalled that he was eating a bowl of Momma (Emma) Cristiani's soup in his parents' trailer during teardown around 11:30 p.m. when a clown alerted him to a hey rube that had broken out on the midway. "Pete, you've got to get over to the concession wagon," the joey shouted.

By the time he arrived at the trouble spot, butchers Craig, Blackie Finch and Paul "Shotgun" Eagan had scattered a trio of teens who were attempting to steal Cokes out of the back of the concession semitrailer. Apparently, Craig "put the slug on one of those guys," breaking the youth's jaw in the process. Unfortunately, the victim was the son of the town's mayor, a fact unknown to Pete and the butchers when they pulled out of town later. The candy butcher blew the show that night, Pete said.

Big Bob Stevens, nee Bonham Stevenson, partnered with the Cristiani family in 1954 and 1955. This image was taken a few years earlier. Pfening Archives.



At the next stop, however, another butcher—Alex (the Fox) Duncan—intercepted Pete as he pulled onto the lot about 9:00 a.m. That's when Cristiani learned that the highly agitated mayor in the previous day's town had sworn a complaint against Pete, and the Royal Canadian Mounties were on the showgrounds trying to arrest him on an assault charge. Fixer Ralph Clawson advised Pete to blow the lot as soon as possible. Cristiani recalled crossing the backyard, passing unrecognized near the officers in the process, and getting into the pickup with Norma and their son and driving slowly away with their trailer in tow.

They crossed the Canadian border at Windsor without incident and motored on toward Detroit. Their destination was Norma's hometown of Quincy, Illinois, where the Cristianis rented an apartment. In the meantime, the injured youth's family hired an attorney in Chicago in an attempt to have Pete extradited to face Canadian justice, even though Pete insisted that "I never slugged anybody. They couldn't I.D. Danny Craig, so they were after me."

Through the Chicago Showman's Club, Cristiani also lawyered up. Even though his counselor finally talked the mayor to dropping the charges, Pete said he decided not to tempt fate by returning to the Dominion. In fact, he said he didn't return to Canada until 1956 when the family took its Cristiani Bros. show up north.

But that didn't mean he was sitting on his hands in Quincy. He arranged the purchase of four trucks to replace vehicles being battered on rough Canadian highways and forcing exhausted drivers, the performing Cristianis among them, to double back for stranded vehicles. The replacement tractors and semitrailers were to be delivered once the show re-entered the U. S. He also dispatched Walter Rice, late of the moribund Cole Bros. Circus, and three other mechanics to Canada to help master mechanic Pete Sadowski patch up the trouble-plagued fleet. Retention of Sadowski's services was virtually guaranteed by the fact that Pete and Lillian Sadowski's daughter June was married to Mogador Cristiani. Truck mishaps mounted as the circus entered the Maritime Provinces. Thankfully, gate receipts held strong.

Other shows weren't so lucky. Ex-Biller Bros. manager Arther Sturmack's attempt to revive his fortunes under the Hagen-Wallace banner—with Frank R. Martin as the principal backer—proved futile. The show closed on June 13 following its disastrous Canadian tour.

Tony Diano's partnership with Ben Davenport began falling apart in late June. The Diano show lost three valuable hands from the old former Dailey Bros.—press agent R. M. Harvey, general agent Pete Lindemann and Leon "Tiger Bill" Snyder, who had the concert. After furloughing briefly, Diano's show continued the tour. On July 31 Diano announced he would turn operations over to Davenport, who continued the show as Wallace Bros. Losses were estimated at \$50,000 since the show's opening in April. "There's going to be no trouble," the disenchanted Diano told *Billboard* for its August 8 issue. "I'm going to turn it over to him. He [Davenport] is to take it over, pay the bills and so on. Ben wants it that way."

Davenport completed the 1953 season under the Wallace Bros. title but permanently abandoned the tented circus route at that point. (Rumors surfaced in 1954 that Davenport and his son-in-law, Pete Cristiani, were planning to put out their own show. It was just talk.)

Bob Stevens's latest Bailey Bros. reincarnation reported good business as it reached Idaho and other western spots, many of them



Both the Stevens and Cristiani camps printed their own stationary prior to the first season's opening in Brownsville, Texas on April 4, 1954. Not surprisingly, the Stevens faction's letterhead put Bailey Bros. before Cristiana, while the Cristiani version put their name ahead of Bailey Bros. and noted that the Cristianis were also brothers. Pfening Archives.

known for wide-open spaces between playable towns. A four-page mimeographed piece promoted the "94th annual tour" of "the grand old show," further described as "the same great circus your grandparents attended before the Civil War." The circus promised three rings of 26 star-studded acts with a cast of 200. Requests for bookings were to be mailed to 1000 N.W. Park Place in Oklahoma City. Stevens closed his show on September 4 at Hays, Kansas, claiming that the 22-week tour netted satisfactory results. He also revealed his intention to launch a 30-week tour in January 1954.


The King-Cristiani show had no lack of business in Canada; the dilemma was reaching the multiple pots of gold. A series of vehicle accidents in Nova Scotia followed on the heels of two strong dates on Prince Edward Island. The August 8 *Billboard* chronicled the carnage: July 25—"Two trucks overturned en route to Sydney on a Saturday morning but no one was injured. . . . An estimated 12,000 caught the show at Sydney."

July 27—"The circus "set records Monday when it gave five performances—two matinees and three night shows [at Halifax]. . . . Total attendance was estimated at 17,500. . . . The shows came after a 243-mile Sunday run. . . . On the way to Halifax, a cage semi-trailer hit the side of a small bridge, causing it to collapse. There was no injury and little damage, but other trucks were forced to make a 20-mile detour. . . . Another truck, carrying five elephants, overturned when it stopped on a soft shoulder. . . . Bulls were turned loose on Indian reservation while the truck was uprighted. In Halifax the pole truck became jammed under a narrow railroad bridge and traffic was blocked for 30 minutes."

July 28—"In Hampton, New Brunswick, "a truck carrying the main tent stuck a soft shoulder and overturned."

July 29—"A loaded truck sideswiped and collapsed part of a bridge at Igonish and plunged 30 feet into the Igonish River. Another truck, following closely, also plunged into the river. . . . A

PERMANENT ADDRESS: THE BILLBOARD, CINCINNATI, OHIO



WINTER QUARTERS: MACON, GEORGIA

1954 SEASON **OFFICIAL ROUTE** No. 8

ALLOW MAIL TIME ENOUGH TO REACH POINTS NAMED BEFORE DATE GIVEN

Date	Town	State	Miles
June 26	Casper	Wyoming	6,486
June 27 to July 6	Moving to Anchorage, Alaska, via Alcan Highway or Alaska Highway Toc Highway Glenn Highway		
July 7 to July 17	Anchorage	Alaska	2,850
July 18	(Sunday)		
July 19 to July 25	Fairbanks	Alaska	438
Both Anchorage and Fairbanks, Alaska, first to be played by any major circus sponsored by the Shrine			
July 31	Dawson Creek	Y. T.	1,528
Total Mileage			11,302

Historic route card showing itinerary from late June to the end of July with dates in Casper, Wyoming; Anchorage and Fairbanks, Alaska; and Dawson Creek in the Yukon Territory. Mileage of 11,302 was more than most circuses covered in a season. Pfening Archives.

bleacher section collapsed on Moncton, N.B., but the 25 patrons who fell were uninjured. . . .

Finally, on July 31, two months from the day it entered the Dominion, the beleaguered King-Cristiani troupe crossed back to the U.S. at Calais, Maine, where it played to a straw night house. Pete Cristiani and relief drivers had arrived two weeks earlier with the four newly-acquired trucks and a load of locally milled hardwood planks. The latter replaced the seating which either had been left at the roadside in New Brunswick or in a creek bed. "There was no menagerie in Calais, either, as its canvas was used to close a gap in the big top, part of the top's side having been ripped by wind or blown into the Bay of Fundy at St. John, N.B."

The show's record of having played every performance was broken at Belmont, Maine, on August 1, when the matinee was lost. It was able to reschedule the parade at 5:30 p.m. The house was full at night.

Ringling-Barnum, Mills Bros. and the Beatty show also suffered lost matinees due to rain. Kelly-Miller co-owner D. R. Miller reported to *Billboard's* Parkinson on September 18 that his circus's business "as a whole has been a drop of about 20 per cent . . . when compared to the big scores of two and three years ago." Kelly-

Miller closed on November 1 at Atlanta, Texas, making the home run to Hugo, Oklahoma.

Clyde Beatty closed his season on October 31 at Galveston, Texas, where film crews shot parade footage to be used in the *Ring of Fear* motion picture. Si Rubens's Rogers Bros. ended its tour at Fort Meyers, Florida, and the owner announced plans to sell his outfit. Mills Bros., making its maiden venture into the Palmetto State, closed at Ormond Beach on November 23. Overall, owner Jack Mills declared his show's 31-week season yielded the most profits to date.

King-Cristiani's late-season business held strong in spite of some weak spots where temperature extremes discouraged all but the true-believers. Its Southern tour took the show into Ringling's hometown on November 10, where Sarasota fans took up two-thirds of the seating capacity at the matinee and filled the big top at night. Demonstrating goodwill between the two circuses, Col. Thomas reported that "Fred and Edna Bradna (long-time RBBB stalwarts) were honored at the matinee and Fred blew the opening whistle."

Ben Davenport took his Wallace Bros. Circus back to Gonzales and on December 5 left to join the Razzore show at Caracas, Venezuela, along with the Caroli troupe from the King-Cristiani show. Davenport also brought along five elephants, his lion act and trainers Arumi Singh and Dog Red Freivogel for the extended South American tour.

The Ringling-Barnum season ended on a sour note. Not only were grosses down, but John Ringling North also announced the firing of his experienced general manager, Art Concello.

Floyd King and Lucio Cristiani likewise ended their tour with a break-up of their partnership. The 1953 season had been good to both parties. Their show's route covered 15,125 miles leading to 225 towns scattered among 23 states and five Canadian provinces. The circus scored numerous four-day shows and nearly 100 days when three performances were given. The last week, climaxing at Sanderson, Georgia, was the poorest, perhaps a premonition of the bad news which was delivered on December 8.

Media reports attributed the falling out to differences between Lucio Cristiani, who wanted to move the 1954 show on rails, and Floyd King, who preferred the highways.

But Pete Cristiani said trouble had been brewing between the two factions from the start of the season. The wives of both King and treasurer Arnold Maley were "egging on" the split, expressing their dissatisfaction with the way the money was being divvied up between the partners, he claimed. Floyd's younger wife Vicki was supposed to help out with the front door handled by family patriarch Ernesto Cristiani, but she seldom showed up for her duties, Cristiani continued. Thus, Lucio's wife June had to fill in, and Corky Cristiani also substituted.

He contended Vicki King was upset that her husband was drawing only one salary, while each of the performing Cristianis enjoyed separate paydays at the ticket wagon. "We were a big expense on the show," he acknowledged, "but we did all the work" in staging the performance and moving the ever-growing circus.

In addition, Cristiani said Maley "agitated Floyd all the time" about the Cristiani family overhead. "There was a little frustration there [at the start of the 1953 tour]; I could see it coming. It was flaring up at the end of the season," Cristiani told the writer in the summer of 2011. "Arnold made a lot of money in that [front] office. He knew how to manipulate the money, not from the show but from the customer. Maley also settled with the sponsoring committee every morning. Floyd had full control over the front end, including routing and promotions. Floyd made a lot of money for himself."

ALMANAC  
Wednesday, July 7, 1954  
Daylight Today 18 Hrs. 57 Min.  
Sunrise 2:35 a.m. Sunset 9:32 p.m.  
Temperature Yesterday  
Maximum 69 Minimum 49

# Anchorage Daily Times

READ BY ALASKANS EVERYWHERE

FORECAST  
Increasing cloudiness tonight, becoming cloudy Thursday. Low to 44; high Thursday, 64.

THIRTY-NINTH YEAR

PHONE 56201

ANCHORAGE, ALASKA, WEDNESDAY, JULY 7, 1954

16 PAGES

PRICE 10 C

# CIRCUS ARRIVES IN TOWN

## 35 Persons Nabbed In Holiday Vice Raid

Eight Charged,  
7 Still Sought,  
20 Released

A super-secret vice raid in which local law officers bagged 35 bawdy house operators and guests at "Mom's Place" on East Fireweed Lane early Sunday was disclosed today with the arraignment of five women and two men.

First indications of the raid were estimated late yesterday when James J. Bennett, identified by the U.S. marshal's office as the operator of the place, was arraigned on charges of living off the earnings

## Congress Probers Told Of Alaskan's Tin Mine Dealings

WASHINGTON (AP) — Congressional investigators were told today a former Interior Department official supported a loan application of the U.S. Tin Corp., and then went to work for the firm at the same time the loan was ap-

## Kadow Seeks Opportunity



## Elephants In Long Journey Over Highway

Confusion Reigns Ball Park As First Elephants Arrive

The circus is here! And Park was a madhouse this morning as the trucks arrived with elephants, horses, ponies and men for the first three-day visit to Alaska.

While performers from countries abroad in their five languages, the staff personnel, equipment, and make sure everything was neat, and

Front page of *Anchorage Daily Times* of July 7, 1954. The paper's co-operation was a press agent's dream. Besides headline, and article and photo above the fold, the front page also contained pieces on Zacchini cannon act, and Eloise Berchtold and her snakes. Inside of first section included a department store ad giving away 300 tickets, and a laudatory editorial welcoming the circus. Second section contained more photos of show. Bailey-Cristiani ran only a one column, ten inch long ad that was probably paid for by the local Shriners. Pfening Archives.

Whatever the reason, King ultimately initiated the dissolution of the highly profitable partnership, Pete said, and decided to revert to the King Bros. title.

Enter Big Bob Stevens, who already had been encouraging Lucio to throw in with Bailey Bros. for its 1954 tour, according to Pete. Stevens first met the Cristianis when he was selling banners on Cole Bros. in the late 1940s.

Pete's 1949 post-season encounter with Stevens, when he retrieved four elephants that the promoter stowed in a barn in Arkansas, left a bitter aftertaste. Facing the loss of the King-Cristiani big top and most of the equipment to Floyd King, Lucio yielded to Steven's lure of open-air trouping, which would also reduce the number of working men to set up and tear down multiple tents.

"[The family] thought it would be a lot easier to stay in the circus business by not messing with all that equipment," he said.

Stevens also told the Cristianis that he had already booked eight or nine weeks of sponsored dates in Oklahoma, Texas and Colorado. The possibility of routing the show into Alaska also came up early in conversations with Big Bob, said Cristiani.

What ultimately turned the tide in favor of Stevens was Floyd King's announcement of Maley as his new partner and his key staffers in the December 26 *Billboard*. Veteran showman Ira B. Watts was named the new superintendent, and most King-Cristiani managers remained loyal to the show's namesake. Pete Cristiani said he believes that Tom Kennedy invested \$50,000 in the King show in return for the concessions privilege.

*Billboard* revealed Lucio's pact with the Texas promoter on January 9, 1954: "Lucio . . . has teamed up with Big Bob (Bonham) Stevens. They will operate the Bailey Bros. & Cristiani Circus as a combination unit playing buildings, fairgrounds, grandstands or ballparks." Although Stevens said producer Gil Gray had no interest in the venture, he hoped the new partnership would pattern its strategy after that of Gray's. Ironically, the four elephants that Stevens lost to Pete Cristiani, and which were owned by Oscar Cristiani, would now be an integral part of the Bailey-Cristiani performance.

Lucio brought in Harry Hammond, the former Dailey Bros. treasurer, to fill a similar position on the new combine. Ben Davenport was reported to have returned to the U.S. to offer the Cristianis the use of his Wallace Bros. title for a second unit under canvas. This proposal went nowhere. Pete confirmed rumors which appeared in *Billboard* later in the season that he and Ben Davenport had discussed fielding a separate circus during the season. But even though Pete was dissatisfied with Stevens' role in the Bailey-Cristiani show, he and his father-in-law abandoned the go-alone approach.

On February 17, 1954, Floyd King announced he was buying out the Cristiani stake in his show for \$74,000, an amount to be repaid in installments out of the King show's receipts from its coming tour.

King and his partner Arnold Maley purchased ten elephants and two side show banner line wagons for \$55,000 from Arthur Wirtz, the owner of the Cole Bros. Circus, which closed for good after the 1953 engagement at Chicago Stadium. King's attempt to buy the Cole title from Wirtz failed. The 1954 King Bros. Circus on 54 vehicles was the largest truck show to that time. Generally playing under auspices, the show paraded and carried 16 elephants. The nut was around \$4,000, gigantic for a trucker at the time, and King and Maley sent several hundred dollars a day to the Cristianis and Arthur Wirtz.

The Cristiani aggregation left the Macon quarters on March 16, heading to Gonzales to frame the new Bailey-Cristiani show for an

# Our Circus Friends

THE CIRCUS is much more than entertainment when it plays in Anchorage.

Its opening here will mark the introduction in Alaska of one of the experiences that is part of the American way of living.

In importance, the circus ranks with baseball, fairs, July Fourth celebrations, Christmas decorations and a turkey dinner on Thanksgiving.

The fanfare and hubbub of a circus are as much a part of the American people as are the din of firecrackers, the music of a merry-go-round on a summer evening, and the floor demonstrations at a political convention.

Oldtimers find their blood percolating with new vigor as the grand opening nears. More than one gray-haired man has been noted eyeing a youngster with the question, "Could take him to the show?"

Young backbones are going to virtually unravel with thrills as they witness, first-hand, the great show they have seen in the movies, have heard their parents talk about, or they have read about.

Alaskans are pleased pink that a real, honest-to-goodness circus has come north.

MORE 'FIRSTS' are going to be established than can be imagined. The circus people will find their audiences the biggest bunch of wide-eyed people that they have ever seen.

For thousands of the younger generation it will be the first circus they have ever attended.

They will see their first elephants.

They will be pop-eyed when they see the beautiful horses perform.

They will see their first equestrians, first aerialists, first animal trainers.

They will learn for the first time what the ring master is, with his long whip.

They will be thrilled by every little detail, down to the most unimportant and insignificant roustabout who moves the props the elephants put their feet on.

Youths will be inspired by the grace, poise and beauty of the aerialists, and

by the clowns who spread cheer wherever they go.

Oldsters will, in a more stiff-necked way, experience the same thrills. They will bore the youngsters to death relating incidents of yore that the acts of today bring to mind.

The warm reception from Alaskans will inspire the Cristiani troupe. The performers will long remember the time they wrote history by bringing the circus to Alaska.

THE ENORMOUS importance of the circus was seen with the first appearance of the colored posters announcing the date in huge letters.

The posters themselves proved to be such a thrill that everyone wanted one or a dozen in his store window, on the sides of buildings, on billboards. They sprouted like dandelions, seemingly all over the countryside.

Adults welcomed them with a feeling of nostalgia. They remembered the time their old home town in the States was similarly plastered. Kids started saving their money for tickets. Commercial, civic and other organizations launched big plans for group parties. Distant communities planned for the movement of almost the whole population by air, to see the show in Anchorage.

The last minute race of the circus company to rally their peculiar collection of talent, spectacles and props for the opening had the populace just as anxious as the officials in charge.

The 3200-mile trek over the Alaska Highway was today's parallel with Hannibal's crossing the Alps with elephants some 2,200 years ago to invade Italy.

Even before the show opens, the Cristianis have won the admiration and friendship of all Alaskans—admiration for their courage in such a gigantic undertaking, and friendship for their warmth and congenial spirit in their relations with local residents.

Alaskans are going to welcome the circus into their hearts like long absent members of the family. From now on, the Cristianis will be full-fledged members of exclusive, and somewhat mysterious fraternity of Alaskans.

Remarkable editorial from the July 7, 1954 *Anchorage Daily Times* in which arrival of the Bailey-Cristiani Circus was viewed as a cultural milestone in pre-television, pre-statehood Alaska. The editorial is eerily similar to hundreds of others published in nineteenth century Midwestern newspapers in which the circus was considered an extraordinary civilizing force. Pfening Archives.

early April premiere in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. (King Bros. set April 10 for its opener in Macon's Central City Park.) Big Bob Stevens was already in Alaska lining up dates for the Cristianis' trek to that wilderness. Alaska was not admitted into statehood until January 1959.

As shown in the Bailey-Cristiani program, Lucio Cristiani was the producer and director, with Cristianis Bros. as owners. As if to demonstrate who actually controlled the operation—and the purse strings—the logo on that season's route cards read "Cristiani Bros. and Bailey Bros. Combined Circus." In addition to Lucio as man-

ager, the show's staff included the following: Bob Stevens, general manager; Oscar Cristiani, equestrian director; Belmonte Cristiani, superintendent; Ralph Clawson, legal adjuster; Harry Hammond, treasurer; Mogador Cristiani, superintendent of tickets, and Pete Cristiani, concessions. Other key personnel were Pete Sadowski, mechanic; Milton Robbins, big show announcer; Walter Rice, superintendent of lights; Nick Bengor, props; Phil Doto, band leader; Bill Tumber, press and radio; Edna Millette, wardrobe, and Steve Fanning, superintendent of elephants.

The performance opened with a "parade of stars," leading into Rahna Keo presenting a cage of bears—an act purchased from John Cuneo, noted Cristiani. Manuel Barrigan offered a stilt-walking balancing act and later his cloud swing. Freddie Canestrelli delighted locals with his leaps over elephants, and Freddie and his wife Ortans Cristiani-Canestrelli performed their head-to-head rola bola routine. "Senor Daviso" Cristiani rode dressage on his mount Playboy. Portis M. Sims presented liberty horses and with his wife Mary showed off a dog-and-pony drill. Tommy Parris showed off his gymnastic skills on the trampoline. Oscar Cristiani's wife Marion fronted the elephant act. And Lucio's comedy highlighted the Cristianis family's famous riding act. The Zacchini cannon furnished the closing routine. Joey Hodgini's comedy car was a part of the performance for the 1954 season only.

As Stevens intended, the show traveled light, with no kid show or any other tented attraction. Depending on the size of the outdoor arena, the circus was set up in either a one-ring, two-platform configuration or the traditional three-ring format. Stevens also booked the circus into buildings in approximately 15 towns, Cristianis said.

The Cristianis quickly became disillusioned with Stevens. "Bob Stevens snowed my brothers by promoting the advantages of a little show. And when we went in there with a good show, he didn't draw any more people than he did before; the towns weren't capable of producing any more people," Cristianis said.

"So consequently he misled my brothers, because he told them how much [business] he did here and how much he did there, which wasn't true."

In addition, the Cristianis bore the total responsibility for the show itself. "All Bob did was the booking. He didn't have any equipment. We moved the show, and we put on the show."

Cristiani said at least seven trucks were required to transport the circus. Tractors pulled two elephant semis, a horse semi and the concessions trailer. A former furniture van hauled the newly-built ring curbs and platforms, four aluminum poles (each collapsed in half for transport) to support the aerial rigging, and a backdrop for outdoor performances. Two buses were converted into sleepers for workingmen. Frankie Doran drove a van towing a 32-foot trailer which served as the cookhouse and pie car, with an extended canvas top. The billing crew also worked out of a van. The caravan included a dozen or so cars pulling house trailers.

To reach its first stand of the season on April 4 required the Bailey Bros-Cristiani outfit to jump 300-miles from Gonzales to

Brownsville, Texas. This was to become an all-too-familiar pattern for the fledgling show's maiden tour.

After a swing through familiar King Bros. towns in East Texas, Oklahoma and the Texas Panhandle, the Bailey-Cristiani show entered the Mountain time zone with a two-day stand in El Paso on May 5-6. From there, the circus played open-air dates in New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, Oregon, Idaho and Wyoming. The Cristiani family originally had appeared in a number of these communities while trouping with the Al G. Barnes circus in 1936 and 1937.

Pete said his concessions were structured "100 per cent different" on Bailey-Cristiani from those of a tent circus such as King Bros. For starters, he trimmed the number of butchers to eight—from 18 on the King-Cristiani circus. In addition to retaining valuable hands from the previous season, he also inherited three concessionaires from Bailey Bros.: Shirley Stevens, Bob's daughter; her husband Johnny Gutierrez; and Johnny's sister Alice Gutierrez, all tending to the snow cone stand. Alice was married the next year to Johnny Walker, who had been with Pete's crew for several seasons. David Budd, Pete's long-time buddy and now a Cristiani family member after marrying Corky Cristiani, had the cotton candy concession.

Although Pete built concession stands especially for the outdoor show, he utilized existing facilities under ballpark stands wherever possible. However, novelties and cotton candy continued to be sold out of separate Cristiani-owned stands, and butchers worked the seats during performances.

Selling out of the ballpark-owned stands offered the advantage of putting circus goers closer to the high-profit items. The disadvantage was that "when people were going to ballpark events, they were used to paying ballpark prices, which were cheaper than ours," Cristiani pointed out. "And the people managing ballparks wanted to have us lower our prices," a request Pete routinely dismissed.

The circus carried a wide selection of novelties, including chameleons tied to a wand. Pete said he dumped this item early on due to lack of customer interest. He wistfully recalled that he bought the lizards for 20 cents each and sold them for \$1.50 in the south and \$2.50 to fans in northern cities and towns. Butchers also encouraged the new owners of these reptiles to spend an extra dollar for a package of dead flies. Cristiani purchased the exotic pet food from a supplier in Iberia, Louisiana, who "kept a bunch of kids busy swatting flies in his backyard." Pete said he was aware that many of these adopted creatures may have expired prematurely, due largely to their youthful caregivers either failing to feed the chameleons a proper diet or keeping them tied to the stick so they couldn't hunt prey on their own.

Pete said his family faulted Stevens for scheduling lengthy jumps without taking into consideration the mileage that the circus fleet had to cover between towns. He also accused the promoter of being lax in handling the advance. Stevens booked many towns by phone because he preferred to hang around the show with his daughter, Cristiani insisted.

Norma Cristiani intensely disliked Stevens. "He wasn't very nice. I don't know what was the matter with him. He'd always been on his own, I guess. And when he took in partners, it was a hard thing for him to accept the Cristianis," she said.

"Pete got sick that year and had to go to Mayo Clinic [for two weeks in the summer] with my dad. And he [Stevens] had his daughter with him, and she had just got married. And, oh God, it was a mess. I got into a big argument with him about the concessions.

"The [Cristiani] family—and I would say this not because I married one of them, but they had a show that was unbelievable. Their performance was outstanding."



Program cover from week-long Bailey-Cristiani engagement in Fairbanks, Alaska, 1954. Pfening Archives.

Among the newspapers agreeing with Norma's critique on the show's early-season performances was the Prescott, Arizona, *Evening News*, which, on its May 17 front page, dished out praise and at the same time pointed out one of the circus's principal weaknesses: "For the first time in years, Prescott residents had the opportunity Saturday [May 15] to enjoy a genuine 'big top' show with the appearance here of the Bailey Brothers and Cristiani Circus.

"It was the first time in many a season that a circus has performed . . . without disappointing audiences by either including too many 'gimmicks,' failing to live up to its advanced publicity, or offering a 'shoddy' group of acts.

"The Bailey Brothers and Cristiani Circus gave the local audience its money's worth.

"Its rolling stock was clean and in good condition and, as a result, the circus arrived in Prescott on schedule, unlike many former shows that appeared here delayed because of equipment breakdowns on the sometimes rugged roads leading into this city, especially the curvaceous White Spar Road.

"Unlike other shows that have performed here, the current circus troupe promised a parade at noon, and it appeared at noon, including all that had been promised. . . .

"The talent exhibited in the Cristiani Circus performances was far superior to any seen in this city previously. Throughout the full two hour show, each act in itself was excellent.

"For many youngsters, it was their first real view of the old-fashioned, talent packed circuses as were once familiar to their parents.

"A particular crowd-thriller was Manuel Barrigan, swing artist, who brought screams from the audience with his daring loose-rope swing performance. In this particularly 'horse conscious' commu-

nity, the crowds 'ohed' at the performance of Senor Daviso and his beautifully trained palamino (sic), and the elephant act also offered some of the best-trained pachyderms seen in a circus show. And, of course, many a local tot is still talking about 'seeing the man shot from a cannon.'

"To sum up other delights of the [circus], the performers performed as if they liked the work and weren't rushing to another date; nevertheless the show kept moving without dull lags; the costumes were beautiful and clean; the food concessions were clean and the show was, as advertised, also clean. . . .

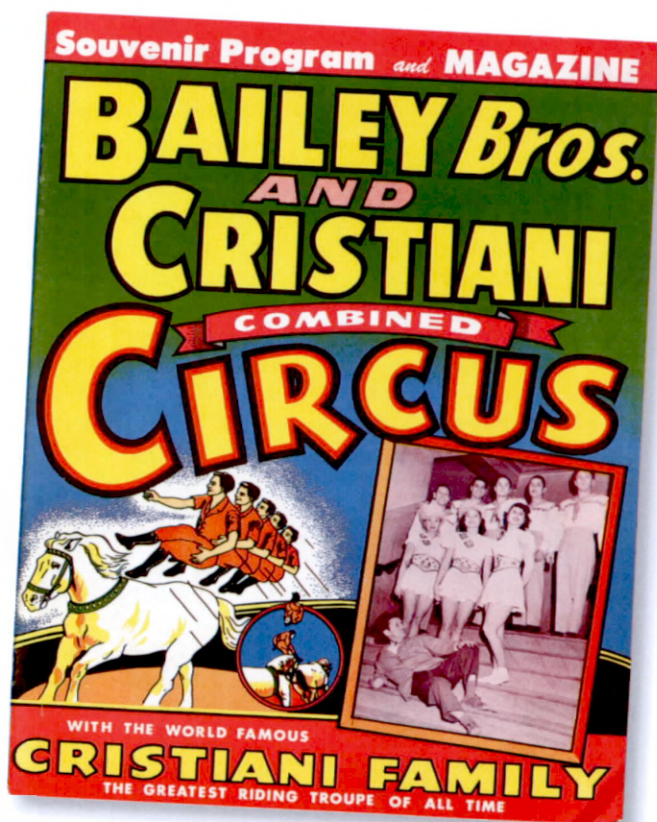
"The huge show, with its top performers and first-class equipment, has a high overhead. Despite this the charges for the performances are no more than those that have been made locally by far less worthy shows. As a result, profits must come from the size of the audiences.

"[The president of the sponsoring Lions Club] said that the returns from the show would not be great as the result of the cynicism for circuses encountered by past shows here, but that next year, given comparable weather, the Bailey Brothers and Cristiani Circus, with its earned reputation, should draw more than twice the audiences it attracted this year."

In advance of circus day in Prescott, the newspaper informed readers that "the Lions have been advised by a representative of the circus that the touring group includes no sideshow, gambling games or devises . . . or 'extra-price events'"—i.e., no after-show.

Alas, the show fared about the same when it reappeared in Prescott in 1955, which confirmed Pete's judgment that the Cristianis simply weren't well known in small communities west of the Mississippi, which is precisely where Stevens had routed the show in 1954.

Bailey Bros. and Cristiani Circus program cover for 1955 featuring the Cristiani family. The show used a window card that year with same image. Pfening Archives.



In addition, the family faced excruciatingly long treks between towns. In numerous instances, Norma Cristiani recalled, "we had 700-mile jumps, and we had two days to get there."

Stevens "had no conception of moving the show," Pete complained.

But those distances were puny compared to the ones they faced at mid-summer. That's when the Cristianis garnered national headlines with their legendary tour of Alaska. The feat was chronicled most recently by Vickie Cristiani Rossi, Oscar's daughter and the author of *Spangles, Elephants, Violets & Me*, a memoir first published in 2007. Vickie was one of more than 100 circus personnel—29 of them Cristianis, including the Zerbini-Cristiani troupe—who ventured into the region known for its Eskimos and frozen tundra.

One of those listed as having made the journey but who actually stayed home was Norma Davenport Cristiani, who had once again returned to her mother's home in Quincy for the delivery of her second child. Pete and his father-in-law did make the trip, with the former handling concessions and the latter taking out a pit show dominated by a 28-foot rock python—something the Alaskan natives had never before seen.

Nor had locals up there seen a live elephant, which Oscar Cristiani remedied by hauling his five bulls up the Alcan highway. Pete said he left the five Norma Davenport bulls behind in the lower 48.

Route Card No. 8 tallied the round trip between the U.S. jump-off point and the Alaskan towns at 11,302 miles, a total which was only slightly under the odometer readings recorded by the King-Cristiani show in its 1952 tour.

Fred Pfening Jr. traced the journey in his 1958 route book on the Cristiani Bros. Circus: "The [Bailey-Cristiani] show played Casper, Wyoming on June 26, 1954, and motored to Sweet Grass, Montana," which was used to cull the show's physical facilities for the long trek.

Some equipment and performers' trailers were parked for the duration. Pete recalled the Alaska-bound fleet included six trucks, including the elephant, horse and concessions semi-trailers and the moving van toting the paraphernalia required to stage the performances. Zacchini's truck-mounted cannon and Davenport's assortment of reptiles also made the journey. Cristiani remembered a caravan of about a dozen cars, some pulling trailers. Personnel needed in advance of the show flew to Anchorage.

Rough roads took their toll on circus vehicles both coming and going. Performers fell victim to the "millions of mosquitoes; they were starving for our blood," Cristiani chuckled.

The entourage "arrived at Anchorage, Alaska, on July 7. En route, the circus attracted great crowds at Fort Nelson, Whitehorse and Dawson Creek, as the residents came to see elephants for the first time," Pfening's route book reported.

The show played Anchorage July 7-17, where the troupe was greeted by an editorial in the *Anchorage Daily Times*, which read in part: "Even before the show opens, the Cristianis have won the admiration and friendship of all Alaskans—admiration for their courage in such a gigantic undertaking, and friendship for their warmth and congenial spirit in their relations with local residents."

The awed performers next played Fairbanks on July 19-25, and en route back to the U.S., stopped for a three-day stand at Dawson Creek, Yukon Territory, Canada beginning July 31.

Personnel stayed in hotels in Anchorage and Fairbanks and were scattered among boarding houses in Dawson Creek.

"Pathe Newsreel covered the trip from Anchorage," Pfening wrote, "Colliers and Life magazines also covered the trip."

Expenses were considerable, but overall, "we did phenomenal business in Alaska," Pete said. "It saved our season." He estimated

the circus netted a quarter of a million dollars from the Alaskan venture.

Though advance publicity for the tour touted the Bailey-Cristiani outfit as the first circus there, the owners of a tiny, Washington state-based "Barnyard on Wheels" claimed they were the first to reach Anchorage over the long Alcan highway—in June 1946, less than a year after the end of World War II.

An Associated Press story, dated June 20, 1946, datelined Anchorage, reported that "two families from Spokane, Wash., brought a cow, a calf and 40 chickens, and the populace along the wilderness route was as bug-eyed as though a circus had come to town.

"Mr. and Mrs. Clark Peterson, who brought three children with them to homestead near Anchorage, said that at Whitehorse, Y.T., many of the residents had never seen a cow. They estimated 1,500 people rallied 'round the chicken pens for the sight of a fresh egg. The hens were showmen. They produced eight eggs."

Circus historian and former Canadian circus owner Al Stencil noted that "several Canadian carnivals made Alaska before Cristiani went up there. They may have had back-end circuses or animal shows on them. One was Henry Meyerhoff's Crescent Shows. Meyerhoff barged over to Alaska from B.C. [British Columbia]."

Regardless, the Bailey-Cristiani endeavor was an achievement of the highest order. In her memoir, Vickie Cristiani Rossi quoted from her mother's diary to summarize the experience: "Money-wise, the Great Alaska Tour was only a marginal success after factoring in the danger and the fathomless expenses, but the natives were leavened considerably because their lives were magnificently enriched."

Returning to the U.S., the Bailey-Cristiani aggregation played Kalispell, Montana, on August 6-7. The show then jumped to Sandpoint, Idaho, followed by a series of dates in Oregon and Washington and a lone one-day stand in California—at Susanville on August 23.

One hundred-degree weather greeted the troupers during a three-day outdoor engagement in Las Vegas, Nevada, September 30-October 1. At least one matinee was cancelled when few towners braved the extreme heat, Cristiani recalled. The show still did good business there overall, he added, in spite of following the better-established Polack Bros. Circus. Nine days later, after a 1,230-mile jump, the Cristianis played Irving, Texas, a suburb of Dallas. The show Sundayed before a two-day stand in McAlester, Oklahoma on September 13-14. The lack of scheduled dates forced a three-day layoff prior to season-ending stands in Louisiana's Cajun country. Following the last performance in Lake Charles on September 30, the kinkers returned to Ben Davenport's Gonzales quarters for the winter.

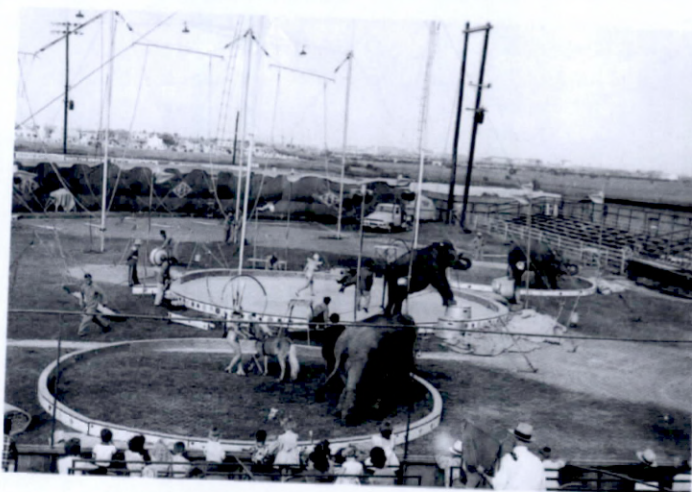
One of the lessons which the family learned as a result of following Stevens' lead, said Pete, was that "it's a lot easier running a big show than a small one, because, Number 1, you had a lot more personnel to fall back on. We had only 15 percent of the people on the ballpark show than there was on a tent show." The lack of workingmen placed an even greater burden on performers, who had no choice but help with the set-up, teardown and driving between engagements.

Cristiani also remembered that "the wind [out west] never stopped. Then there was the rain and cold." Both factors contributed to the circus missing numerous matinees and more than a few night performances. Even when the performance went on under adverse conditions, aerial routines and Zacchini's shot into unfriendly skies were routinely cancelled, Cristiani said.

"I don't think Floyd King could have helped in that situation," Pete reflected on Stevens's routing choices. "I just think the territory wasn't too good."

Cristiani said the family instituted a number of routing changes for the 1955 tour, the last under the Bailey-Cristiani banner. In addition to dropping unprofitable towns, the Cristianis hired ex-King Bros. promoter Jake Rosenheim to book early-season dates in Florida and Louisiana. Clarence Peters (Kutrow) also handled some engagements.

The 1955 edition, featuring a "white elephant" named Emma—acquired from a New York dealer, premiered on March 26 in Fort Pierce, Florida. A highly profitable three-day stand in West Palm Beach and two days in St. Petersburg preceded a five-day, 1,061-mile jump to Texarkana, Texas. Stevens resumed his booking responsibilities for all points west, Pete said. The show spent the bet-



The Bailey-Cristiani opera was an open-air circus as shown here during a 1955 engagement. W. H. B. Jones photo, Pfening Archives.

ter part of three months in the Rockies and on the west coast.

Cristiani recalled a Shrine engagement at Billings, Montana from June 13 to 18 where "we packed the building every day," and a weeklong grandstand appearance at the Oregon State Fair in Salem from September 3 to 10, which his brother Mogador had booked. Bypassing Las Vegas, the Cristianis opted for fresh Northern California dates at Auburn, Antioch, Concord and Alameda, followed by a mountainous, 300-mile return visit to Susanville on August 25-27 without any bookings during the intervening four days. A 750-mile, two-day journey out of Twin Falls, Idaho, brought the weary troupers to their last Rocky Mountain engagement at Littleton, Colorado on September 17-18. The Cristianis covered yet another 700 miles in a single day to show up for performances at Wichita Falls, Texas on September 20-22.

"We burned up a number of engines, clutches and tires in those mountains," Pete grumbled.

A two-show stand in Graham, Texas, on September 24, and a series of "en route" listings preceded successful business in Louisiana, including a six-day stint from October 4 to 9 at the state fair in Shreveport.

With the onset of autumn weather, the Bailey-Cristiani show moved indoors in successive stands at Tulsa, Oklahoma; and Kan-

sas City, Topeka and Hutchison, Kansas, followed by agonizing jumps for building dates in Rockford, Illinois; Waterloo, Iowa, and Omaha, Nebraska. The Cristianis completed their 1955 season—and their two-year contract with Bob Stevens—in Peoria, Illinois, on November 11-12. The show had racked up a remarkable 21,215 miles in its coast-to-coast tour. Retaining all equipment, the Cristianis headed for Sarasota where they assembled their stand-alone circus.

Pete said both seasons with Stevens, as difficult as they proved to be, were profitable.

In contrast, the Cristianis' former partner didn't fare as well. Floyd King's venture with Arnold Maley, which took to the road in 1954 under the familiar King Bros. title, constituted a much larger circus at a reported 54 trucks than Bailey-Cristiani fielded on slightly more than a half dozen trucks.

The Cristianis' two years with Stevens did enable—or force—them to collectively assume greater responsibilities in circus management. And those challenges helped the family when they went out on their own without partners in 1956.

Next: Cristiani Bros. Circus entertains fans coast to coast for five years. Pete Cristiani picks up the pieces to frame Cristiani-Wallace Bros. Circus in 1961. **BW**

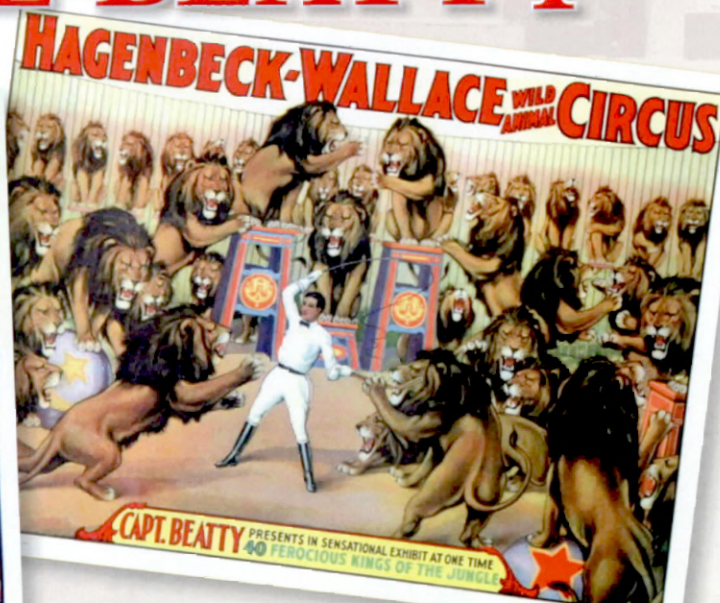
#### **Bailey Bros.-Cristiani Circus 1954 Route**

April 4-5, Brownsville, Texas  
 April 6, Mercedes  
 April 7-10, Corpus Christi  
 April 11, Sunday off  
 April 12-13, Texas City  
 April 14-15, Beaumont  
 April 16-17, Port Arthur  
 April 18, Sunday off  
 April 19, Marshall  
 April 20, Paris  
 April 21, Ardmore, Oklahoma  
 April 22, Altus  
 April 23 Clinton  
 April 24, Woodward  
 April 25, Sunday off  
 April 26-27, Borger, Texas  
 April 28-29, Pampa  
 April 30-May 1, Amarillo  
 May 2, Hobbs, New Mexico  
 May 3-4, Pecos, Texas  
 May 5-6, El Paso  
 May 7, Alamogordo, New Mexico  
 May 8, Las Cruces  
 May 9, Sunday off  
 May 10, Silver City  
 May 11-12, Globe, Arizona  
 May 13, Coolidge  
 May 14, En Route  
 May 15, Prescott  
 May 16, Flagstaff  
 May 17 En Route  
 May 18, Richfield, Utah  
 May 19-20, Price  
 May 21, Murray  
 May 22, Brigham City  
 May 23, Sunday off  
 May 24, Caldwell, Idaho  
 May 25, Burns, Oregon  
 May 26, John Day

May 27, En Route  
 May 28, Enterprise  
 May 29, Baker  
 May 30, Sunday off  
 May 31, Weiser, Idaho  
 June 1, Ontario, Oregon  
 June 2, Mountain Home, Idaho  
 June 3, Burley, Idaho  
 June 4, En Route  
 June 5, Logan, Utah  
 June 6, Sunday off  
 June 7, Rexburg, Idaho  
 June 8-9, Pocatello  
 June 10, Malad City  
 June 11, Montpelier  
 June 12, Evanston, Wyoming  
 June 13, Sunday off  
 June 14-17, En Route  
 June 18-19, Laramie  
 June 20, Sunday off  
 June 21-23, Cheyenne  
 June 24-26, Casper  
 June 27, Sunday off  
 June 28-July 6, En Route  
 July 7-17, Anchorage, Alaska  
 July 18, Sunday off  
 July 19-25, Fairbanks  
 July 26-30, En Route  
 July 31, Dawson Creek, Yukon Territory  
 August 1-5, En Route  
 August 6-7, Kalispell, Montana  
 August 8, Sunday off  
 August 9, Sandpoint, Idaho  
 August 10-11, Wenatchee, Washington  
 August 12-13, Pendleton, Oregon  
 August 14-15, Tacoma, Washington  
 August 16, Longview  
 August 17, En Route  
 August 18, McMinnville  
 August 19, Prineville  
 August 20, En Route  
 August 21, Lakeview  
 August 22, Sunday off  
 August 23, Susanville, California  
 August 24, En Route  
 August 25, Elko, Nevada  
 August 26-27, Ely  
 August 28, Cedar City, Utah  
 August 29, Sunday off  
 August 30-September 1 Las Vegas, Nevada  
 September 2-9, En Route  
 September 10-11, Irving, Texas  
 September 12, Sunday off  
 September 13-14, McAlester, Oklahoma  
 September 15-17, En Route  
 September 18-19, Alexandria, Louisiana  
 September 20, New Iberia  
 September 21, Lafayette  
 September 22, Crowley  
 September 23, Eunice  
 September 24, En Route  
 September 25-26, Lake Charles

# THE RINGLING POSTERS OF CLYDE BEATTY

by Dave Price



This is a story about the posters the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey show used to advertise Clyde Beatty's New York and Boston appearances in the early nineteen-thirties, but we need a few basics before getting to that.

We have to go back even before John Ringling bought the American Circus Corporation in the fall of 1929. First of all, Beatty had been around as long as there had been an American Circus Corporation, although just barely. As an eighteen-year-old, he joined the Howe's Great London Circus, owned by Jerry Mugivan and associates, when that outfit played Washington Court House, Ohio, on August 16, 1921. The owners of Howe's and three other large circuses incorporated as the American Circus Corporation on December 14 of that same year. Of course the major share-holders had been involved in the circus business for years before, but never had they had four shows out at the same time before that year.

The 25-car 1921 Howe's show had been formed when Mugivan took his 15-car 1920 Howe's show into Lancaster, Missouri, bought the 25-car 1920 Yankee Robinson show from William P. Hall and put the best of the two together (using mostly Yank equipment) to make a dandy 25-car show capable of fighting Al G Barnes for the Great American West. After a long, long season (which had opened in Albuquerque and included a tour of Canada), it finally closed at Opelika, Alabama, on November 14, and went into quarters in Montgomery.

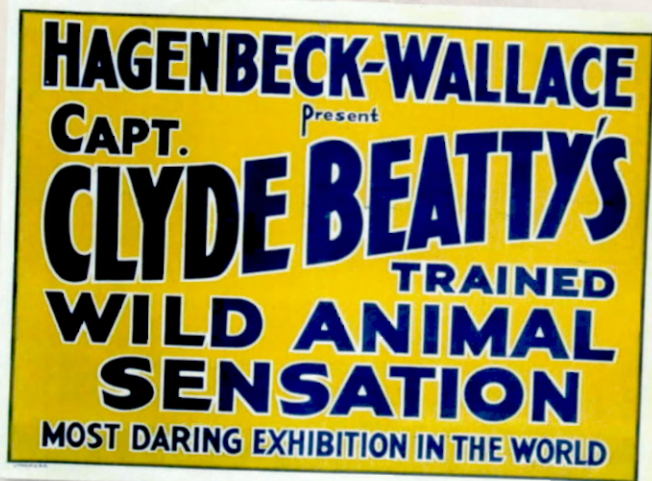
Early in 1922 the owners made a deal with the Gollmar family for use of the Gollmar title. They renamed the Howe's show Gollmar Bros Circus and leased the Howe's title to Mike Golden who re-titled his Palmer Bros. Circus.

Beatty had not wasted his time since joining out and by the end of 1922 he had been trusted with the polar bear act a few times and



also did a comedy number with the hippo Victor and clown Abe Goldstein on the hippodrome track. He had worked under both Louis Roth and John "Chubby" Guilfoyle, recognized top trainers. Prior to the 1923 season it had been decided to take the Gollmar show into Peru and blend it into the 1922 John Robinson's Circus making a bigger and better Robinson show for the supposed one hundredth tour of 1923. Much of the 1922 Robinson equipment was offered for sale. It was announced that the show would be a "wild animal circus" and Peter Taylor was brought over to work a mixed lion and tiger act. Beatty presented the polar bears.

This arrangement lasted for two years on Robinson's and in 1925 both Taylor and Beatty were moved to Hagenbeck-Wallace with Beatty working a highly-mixed act of leopards, pumas, lions, hyenas and a black leopard. Of course Taylor still was featured with his big lion and tiger act and Robert "Bobby Mack" McPherson had a large group of tigers.



All illustrations from the collection of the author.

Before that year was out and after several bad attacks, Taylor found it necessary to drop the act and leave the show. Manager Danny Odom took a chance on the young Beatty and gave him the headline wild animal act. Eighty-five years later there may be different opinions of Beatty as a trainer but no one denies his dynamic showmanship. He had star quality and from the day he burst into the big arena with Taylor's former act, audiences loved him. Almost immediately newspapers began to call his act the highlight of the show.

With the encouragement of the management he gradually enlarged the act over several years until they were able to advertise that Captain Beatty was working forty ferocious kings of the jungle.

John Ringling bought the American Circus Corporation with borrowed money on September 6, 1929, and beginning in 1931 started bringing Beatty from Hagenbeck-Wallace every spring for the New York and Boston dates. This plan lasted through 1934, continuing after Ringling lost control of his circus empire in mid-1932, though Beatty did not appear at Boston the final year, Jess Adkins insisting that he rejoin Hagenbeck-Wallace during the Chicago Coliseum date.

To advertise Beatty for two dates each spring, there was no need to design new posters since Hagenbeck-Wallace had already issued several designs on Beatty which could easily be reworked to sub-

stitute the Ringling title. When Beatty first began playing the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey indoor spring dates, two Hagenbeck-Wallace posters were so altered: a pictorial and a lettered bill.

Interestingly the layout on the pictorial litho did not lend itself to the full "Ringling Bros and Barnum & Bailey" title so it was simply re-titled "Ringling Barnum Circus," one of very few bills to use this shortened form. Here we present for your inspection both the Hagenbeck-Wallace and the Ringling versions of the two aforementioned lithographs. For some reason the pictorial shows only male lions, not an accurate representation of Beatty's mixed act. Note that the lettered bill required some crowding to get the full Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey title in and from a distance might look as if it also reads "Ringling Barnum."

By the final year of Beatty's appearances in New York, Hagenbeck-Wallace was using a new and improved pictorial litho with male and female lions, tigers and even a couple of black leopards for good measure. This is the poster with the oft-quoted line "in a single-handed battle with forty of the most ferocious brutes that breathe." The layout of this one left plenty of room for the full Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey title.

As far as we know these are the only three posters used during Beatty's four short seasons with the Big One and we do not believe they have ever all been shown together along with their Hagenbeck-Wallace counterparts prior to this time. As many of you are aware, Ringling-Barnum brought back one of these designs with Terrell Jacobs's name on it in the late 1930s, and many years later, after the Feld family had purchased the circus, reproduced the Jacobs version to sell at the concession stands or by mail. BW

# KIDNAP IN CONNECTICUT

BY NEIL PARSONS

*The following account is from Dr. Parsons's recently published Clicko The Wild Dancing Bushman (University of Chicago Press: December 2010), a biography of Franz Taibosh. Better known as Clicko, he was a stalwart in the Barnum and Bailey, and then the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey sideshow from 1918 to 1938. This excerpt recounts Taibosh's 1919 season on Ringling-Barnum after he had been liberated from his exploitative manager, Morris Hepston, by whom Taibosh had been enticed away six years earlier in South Africa.*

The Bridgeport Post of Thursday, December 12, 1918 carried an extraordinary report headlined "African Bushman remains abducted" on its front page. The other main news of that day was that President Woodrow Wilson was to arrive in France on Friday the 13th—"his lucky day." The bushman story read in part: "No trace has been found by the police of Franz Taaibosh, Barnum and Bailey's African bushman, who is said to have been abducted from No. 38 Courtland-street where he lived with his manager Captain Morris Hepston. The bushman who is said to be over 100 years old was spirited away during the absence of the captain some time yesterday afternoon and although the police have searched the city for him he has not been located. Taaibosh is said to be a valuable freak attached to one of the side shows at the Barnum and Bailey circus and has been traveling with the show all summer."

The Post added: "While Captain Hepston was at work for the United States Housing Corporation some one telephoned the house and when told that the captain was out said they would telephone later. When the captain returned about 4:30 the bushman was gone."<sup>1</sup>

Twelve years later, the same newspaper expanded the story further: "The circus had returned from making its last stand in Texas, and Hepston brought the 'wild man' back to Bridgeport and put him in a furnished room. Roomers in the house noticed that the 'wild man' was poorly clad and they called the circus office, then on Norman street.

"Some of the men came down to the rooming house and found the little 'wild man' wearing women's stockings, a woman's undergarment, women's shoes, and a pair of Hepston's pants that had been 'amputated' in the legs to fit the 'wild man.'

"The little savage pleaded to be taken away. He was munching on crusts of stale bread and showed the circus men a glass of water, they said. He made them understand that he was living on bread and water. He was taken to the circus quarters by the men and he has been with the circus ever since as a free agent."<sup>2</sup>

The items of women's clothing may be said to confirm the general emasculation of Frank Taibosh as a victim of Paddy Hepston. Whether they indicated any more intimate relationship between the two men can only be guessed at. A third version of the events on that day is contained in the words of Dixie Willson, who claimed to know "the real life drama of Clicko." "When the season was over, the captain settled down in winter quarters, and there it was that

some one realized his cruelty to the little African. The matter was brought to Mr. Ringling's attention and one day the captain came home to his boarding house to find the wild man's cage empty—the wild man had gone!

"Immediately detectives for the Englishman went to work and very soon placed the theft at the door of—the show's attorney, Mr. Frank Cook! A warrant was sworn out for Mr. Cook's arrest, but since no trace could be found of the wild man, no arrest could be made! Mr. Cook neither admitted nor denied the charge, [but] simply gave them *carte blanche* to prove anything they could."<sup>3</sup>

Cook family tradition expands on the events of Wednesday, December 11, 1918. Frank Cook arranged for an alluring female to divert Hepston in a bar, presumably the bar to which Hepston repaired after work each evening. While Hepston was engaged with the doxy in the bar, Cook and his chauffeur broke into Hepston's unheated apartment. They found Franz Taibosh sitting semi-naked under a horse blanket in a bare room, looking miserably cold and ill-fed, with the bones left over from previous meals scattered across the floorboards. Franz greeted them in friendly manner. They wrapped him in Cook's fur coat, and carried him downstairs and outside to the car.

They drove straight to Albany, arriving in the early hours of the next day. Franz was deposited at the Cook family home, under the charge of Cook's daughter Frances. She nursed him back to robust health, while Frank Cook returned to face the music at Bridgeport.<sup>4</sup>

Dixie Willson is correct that, "The captain dogged the Ringling attorney's footsteps," seeing the kidnap as the outcome of a conspiracy on the part of top Ringling management. But she is incorrect in supposing that Franz was hidden from public view for the next two summer seasons. Ringling riches could buy quicker justice than that. The Wild Dancing Bushman was openly paraded at the Spring opening of the Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus on March 29, 1919, at Madison Square Garden, New York.

Whether or not "his apprehensive black eyes [were] darting at the milling crowds," the little wild man in the leopard-skin was certainly "well guarded . . . quite out of reach of the captain or the captain's men" when he appeared on the hippodrome track in the opening spec. Hepston had turned to the British consul-general in New York for aid. The consulate is said to have reacted with surprising alacrity as soon as the Wild Dancing Bushman appeared at Madison Square Garden. Once again we have Dixie Willson's fanciful account: "When Mr. Cook returned to his hotel after the



Long-time legal adjuster Frank Cook, shown here with his daughter Barbara about 1934, was the mastermind behind getting Clicko away from Morris Hepston. Evelyn J. Cook photo, Pfening Archives.



George Auger, the Welsh Giant who died in late 1922, lofts Clicko above his head while Abomah, the African Giantess, does the same to a little person who is obviously fascinated with Clicko's hair. Other members of the sideshow watch admiringly. Photo said to have been taken on Barnum & Bailey in Madison Square Garden, 1918. Pfening Archives.

matinee performance, he found officers and papers waiting, on a charge of 'forcibly detaining a British subject.'

"If my friend Mr. Taibosh is upstairs," Mr. Cook said to the clerk, 'please ask him to come down.'

"And presently out of the elevator stepped out a smartly tailored 'wild man,' polished shoes, derby and stick.

"You want me, Mr. Cook?" he asked, with a pleasant, odd little accent.

"And within the next five minutes the officers found that Mr. Franz Taibosh as a guest of the hotel had registered for himself, had paid his own bills there, carried a contract in his pocket signed 'on the dotted line,' for himself, and by himself. . . .

"Who is it I am forcibly detaining?" Mr. Cook inquired blandly of the law."

If the details of this charade are anything like true, there had been considerable preparation and rehearsal. Franz Taibosh could swagger with the best and was a born mimic, but he couldn't read, or write more than a squiggle, apparently could never keep track of money, and at this stage probably had rather rudimentary command of English. He may have understood English well enough but had so far had little chance of speaking in his "funny little Bushman-English voice," as Hepston had kept him virtually incommunicado.<sup>5</sup>

The British consulate in New York investigated Hepston's guardianship over Taibosh, mindful of the fact that their passports, enabling them to be absent from Britain, had come up for annual renewal on March 18, 1919. Frank Cook undoubtedly used his social connections to catch and keep the ear of the British acting consul-general in New York. The latter wrote to his superiors at the Foreign Office in London, on April 22 that "there has been considerable correspondence at this Office" on the matter of Franz Taibosh. He added—what Cook must have told him—that Taibosh had *deserted* Hepston to seek the *protection* of Cook. Frank Cook's superior

class cachet obviously carried greater weight than the British nationality of Hepston.

A satisfactory answer must have been received from the British authorities, clearing the way for Frank Cook to obtain U. S. Immigration permission (File 7897) for Franz Taibosh to remain resident for another eighteen months until November 1, 1920. The file on the case at the Foreign Office in London has since been destroyed, and thus cannot be found in the National Archives of England and Wales. But a copy of the consul general's letter of April 22, 1919 survives in the South African National Archives at Pretoria.<sup>6</sup>

Hepston turned to Sam Gumpertz for help. Hepston had signed a contract with Gumpertz in May 1918 committing himself to supply the services of the Wild Dancing Bushman once more to the Dreamland Circus Sideshow, on Coney Island, as from "on or about May 1, 1919." Clause 14 of the contract had committed Hepston "in the event of a violation of this contract, that an injunction restraining the Artist from performing for any other person may issue out of a court of competent jurisdiction."

On June 27, 1919, Morris Hepston, with Gumpertz's backing, obtained a Bridgeport Connecticut court order through his attorney against the Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey circus, against the Ringling brothers as a corporation, against John Ringling himself, and against Frank A. Cook. The order summoned the parties to court on September 1, and ordered them to deposit \$6,000 with the court, against the \$5,000 being claimed by Hepston in damages.

Hepston as plaintiff identified Cook as the person who had entered his Bridgeport apartment the previous December 11, and the circus as Cook's employer that now had the Bushman in its "possession . . . held and detained against his will." Hepston claimed that the Bushman had been placed "about a dozen years prior" in "care, custody and control . . . as his servant" by the British South African Government (*sic*). Coney Island impresario Samuel Gumpertz tried to help Hepston maintain control of Clicko in 1919. Pfening Archives.



Cuba and first employer in America. He might also have had plans of his own to wrest Clicko from Hepston, and was annoyed that Frank Cook had pipped him to the post.<sup>7</sup>

Just before the start of the circus season, there was a big party thrown by John Bryce of 1310 Brock Street, in Albany New York, for Frank Cook and his family and friends. *Billboard* reported, "A great time was had by everybody." This could have been, in a very real sense, Franz Taibosh's coming-out party—out of hiding for the summer season with the newly amalgamated Ringling-Barnum Circus.

On March 25, 1919 *Billboard* proclaimed: "The circus was born again here this afternoon," with the opening of the World's First Super Circus, at Madison Square Garden. The matinee began with John Agee, the equestrian director from the Ringling circus, blowing his whistle for the enormous doors at the end of the Garden to open. The grand entry procession, when all the animals and performers—including the freaks—trooped around the hippodrome track, was followed by the parade of elephants, and so on down the list through acrobats picked out by spotlights, and equestrians starring daring young "Poodles" Hanneford, to a final hippodrome race with fiery steeds and Roman chariots, in the manner borrowed by and immortalized in Fred Niblo's film *Ben Hur* (1925).

In the words of the circus historian Mark St Leon: "The new circus brought together under one spread of canvas the largest array of circus artists ever seen in one place at one time. Among them were the three finest riding acts in the world: the May Wirth troupe, the Hannefords and the Davenports."

Stars of the big top show this year were equestrienne May Wirth and aerialist Lillian Leitzel. Wirth exhibited genuine prowess and dexterity: "a back somersault through a paper hoop and the same stunt with the hoop alight with fire," on the back of a galloping horse. Her tutor in this was Orrin Davenport (1885–1961), who also performed spectacular somersaults from one galloping horse to another. Edwin "Poodles" Hanneford held the world record for vaulting on and off a horse, twenty-six times in succession. Leitzel (1892–1931) was known for an act that was more a feat of resistance to pain than skill. Dressed in a spangled leotard, she spun by one arm on a rope to the tune of Rimsky-Korsakov's "Flight of the Bumble-Bee," dislocating and relocating her shoulder on each spin or "plunge." By the fortieth spin her hair would fly loose from its pins, spraying out long blonde curls.

Lew Graham was the announcer of the main show under the big top as well as sideshow outside talker. Unlike one-ring circuses where the ringmaster doubled as announcer of acts and equestrian director, the huge hangar-like tent of a three-ring circus needed a dedicated announcer with a huge voice. Lew Graham obliged: "His deep resonant voice, magnified only by his cupped hands, carried to the farthest reaches of that huge tent as he told of the wonders of this or that act which the audience was about to witness."<sup>8</sup>

As equestrian director, John Agee struggled with the enormous task of keeping up the pace of performances. He was replaced as equestrian director in the third week by his deputy Fred Bradna from the old Barnum & Bailey show. Otherwise the initial Ringling-Barnum run at Madison Square Garden appears to have been a success from the start. Extra matinee shows were given in the morning, including a free show for sailors and soldiers back from



The legendary Perry G. Lowery led the sideshow band on Ringling-Barnum in the 1920s. Pfening Archives.

the war, and another show for patients in Bellevue Hospital at the foot of East 26th Street. Clown Fred Egner, followed by his devoted geese, got the biggest laughs. After Manhattan the Ringling-Barnum went under canvas in cool weather at Brooklyn, showing off its new, bigger and better canvas tops. The circus was now more mechanized than ever, with stakes driven in by power hammers.<sup>9</sup>

The cold weather continued until May when the Big One moved on from six performances in Philadelphia to Washington D. C. Frank Cook went on ahead and was entertained by the Elks, a Masonic order popular among showmen, in chilly Philadelphia. Lew Graham's sideshow was said to have smashed all previous Ringling Brothers or Barnum & Bailey attendance records in Washington. As well as Graham, Ingalls and Vino as sideshow lecturer, there were two ticket-sellers, two doorkeepers, two men in charge of canvas, and two other personnel managers.

Franz Taibosh always reckoned that his best friends among freaks were the giants and midgets. The supposedly 8'-4" in George Auger was known as the Welsh Giant because he actually came from Wales, but the title harked back to Barnum's spurious Cardiff Giant, a man-shaped piece of rock hewn from a quarry at Cardiff in upstate New York. Auger wrote comic music-hall sketches in his spare time, and was always the best of friends with midget people. Mr. and Mrs. Doll referred to the brother and sister act of German-born Kurt (Harry Doll) and Frieda Schneider (Grace Doll), who had come to America in 1916 with their mother Mrs. Bert Earles as their manager. Younger sisters Frieda (Daisy Doll) and Elly Schneider (Tiny Doll) were soon to join the duo to constitute a whole "Doll family," which adopted first the Earles surname and then the surname of Doll in the 1930s.

A newspaper clipping probably dating from May 1919 tells of a correspondent called Russ Simonton who joined the Barnum & Bailey sideshow team over lunch one day in the cookhouse tent. Simonton noted that George Auger, the star of the sideshow, sat down opposite his friends the Dolls. Grace Doll berated the giant good-naturedly, and prattled on about a love-letter mailed her by a farm boy called George Plum. Simonton discovered that "Freaks are regular folks, with regular troubles and regular laughs." Auger said: "We may be out of the ordinary, but we have brains and feelings." One of the photographs that accompanied the text was: "Clicko (lower right), Australian bushman, shaves himself with a safety

razor." The same photograph was later used by another newspaper with a caption explaining that he was eighty years old and had left fourteen wives in Africa.

Simonton was told again and again that the real freaks under the sideshow top were the spectators on the ground, not the performers on stage. But this did not stop Simonton from including the nonsense that "Clico, last survivor of the Australian bushmen," was holding a conversation over the lunch table with the chimpanzee Congo, "the lowest example of human life." It is noteworthy that Franz Taibosh was now being given the semi-personal name "Clico" in circus publicity, even if it was still unclear if he was a Bushman of African or Australian provenance: at least "Wild Dancing" had been eliminated from his title.<sup>10</sup>

The Ringling-Barnum sideshow band had eighteen musicians, under the firm and professional direction of Professor P.G. Lowery. His wife sang with the band as soprano. Lowery was already an institution when he took on the combined circus sideshow band, after two decades of circus experience and a stint with the U. S. Army.

The *Billboard* correspondent "Circus Solly" in his "Under the Marquee" column, put the sound of the sideshow or "kid show" minstrel band at the very core of that glorious feeling which characterized circus life, as it played before the big top was opened: "hearing the galloping rat-tat-tat of the 'kid' show band (while you look for the 'flag' at the cookhouse)."<sup>11</sup>

From Washington the circus progressed to Wilmington, Delaware, where a commotion was caused in the inaugural street parade when a wild animal tried to run off. After that night's show, local notables entertained the circus doctor Doc Shields, Frank Cook, Clyde Ingalls and other circus managers. Such receptions were commonplace for top circus people such as Cook, since in most places circus day came but once a year. Usually the receptions were for men only, and only the best liquor was served. Performers were usually not invited, but it was to become evident that Frank Cook was taking Franz Taibosh along to such parties as his entertaining sidekick.

Frank Cook was known as "Papa Cook" among circus folk, and as "Cookie" among his intimates. After his death, *Billboard* simply called him "the king of the fixers." In a get-rich-quick age, even "Sunday School shows" (rather than "grift shows") such as the Ringling-Barnum Circus were obliged to indulge in a little bribery and corruption at the level of local politics. Cook is said to have lived by the classic showbiz maxim of "the show must go on." He had to negotiate the lowest possible licence fees and lot rentals, and had to bribe local officials with free passes to shows. "In all my years of tramping," remarked one old circus trapper, "I don't believe I ever heard of a local official buying and paying for a ticket, and that included his family." Local policemen even ate free meals in the circus cookhouse tent.

Cook maintained an enormous range of influential contacts and friends in the eastern and middle states of the United States and in

the Canadian provinces. Fraternal organizations were an essential part of such networking. As well as being secretary of the Barnum & Bailey chapter of the Loyal Order of Moose, he was a member of the Masonic Lodge of St. Cecile in New York. Top managers like Cook travelled around with a bunch of free passes in their pockets. In return these managers shared in the lavish entertainments with which municipal dignitaries celebrated their annual circus day.<sup>12</sup>

The weather turned stifling hot by the time the circus reached Syracuse in upstate New York in early June 1919, where thousands of people lined the streets to witness the parade of the world's biggest-ever circus. One of the brightly colored circus wagons, drawn by a team of horses, got temporarily stuck under a low bridge. At Utica, the next city east of Syracuse, the geese clown Fred Egner died of unexplained causes, aged forty-five. By the time the circus made Boston on June 16, after a two-hundred-mile railroad jump, the weather was cold and drizzling. But Boston was a "straw house," meaning that there were more people than fixed seats, so bales of straw were spread out as extra seating.

The Ringling-Barnum circus continued to break its attendance records in Connecticut, through Waterbury and New Haven until it reached Bridgeport, its home base, on June 27, 1919. Here, in the hometown of so many circus staff and performers, there were special celebrations. Maybe the circus managers also wanted to cock a snook against the court order obtained against them by Hepston and Gumpertz that same day. The circus baker excelled in the quality of his cream puffs, and Franz Taibosh was invited to preside at a management party for Charles Hutchinson, the circus treasurer.<sup>13</sup>

A story about the party appeared in the *Bridgeport Post*, under the headline

"West End in Uproar When Clico Runs Wild. Rubber Haired Toastmaster Escapes with Bill Steinke's Benny." Bill Steinke was the *Post's* cartoonist and columnist who put in a guest appearance as a circus clown; his "benny" was his top hat. These were also known to be the last days of legal drinking, as Prohibition would soon come into effect throughout the United States. The article read: "His name is Clico. He bears no relationship to any of the new temperance drinks. But today he is the source of vows by many West Enders to hereafter climb on the wagon for good, whether school keeps in or not after July 1.

"It all started when some friends of Manager Charlie Hutchinson of Ringling Bros. and Barnum and Bailey Combined Shows decided to give him a "Welcome Home" Party at his home in Elmwood Place after the midnight hour this morning. As a novelty, Clico, the rubber haired negro, was requisitioned from the show to act as toastmaster, chairman and general fun maker. Clico was in good spirits and his merry antics brought out many a hearty laugh."

During the course of the merriment Franz, no doubt more than a little tanked up, put on the silk top hat belonging to Bill Steinke, and ran off into the night wearing it. The article continued: "Fred Bradna, ring master for the Ringling circus, was the first to miss



In 1925 Clico posed with Anna Gibbons, Arteria the tattooed lady; and Grace and Harry Doll; and probably Princess Wee Wee, the African-American midget. Bernard Kobel photo, Pfening Archives.



The Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus paraded only in 1919 and 1920. The Russia wagon followed by the elephants are seen in parade in Atlanta on October 18, 1920. A. L. Chumley photo, Pfening Archives.

the Para haired kaffir. 'He's gone! Clicco has vamoosed!' cried Fred. 'Hurry, he's gone!' cried Mrs. Fred, who was also among the throng.

"'Who's gone?' chorused those in the other room.

"'Clicco.'

"Bill Steinke forgot to look for his hat. Charlie Hutchinson forgot his too in Elmwood Place, Bridgeport. Mayer turned a somersault. Suckley, assistant to John Ringling, jumped to the phone. Jake just ran to the door.

"The party adjourned to the drizzling rain and stygian darkness. . . The quest took the group through the principal streets of the West End. At Park Avenue, a policeman was found apparently holding up a last-week-in-June celebrator by the arm. 'Did you see him?' chorused the party, excitedly.

"'See who?' shot back the cop.

"'Clicco, the rubber-haired man.'

"'Gosh, I was just trying to figure out whether this was a man. I kinda thought it was the guy with the smoked glasses. I don't need him anymore,' spoke the policeman, promptly turning Clicco over to his keepers. Bill Steinke's silk lid was a little battered, but Clicco looked as debonair as ever. He wore no coat and his white shirt shone out brightly in the night. His suspenders were hanging down.

"'Click-click-click, clicko-clickee-clic-ka,' which means 'It's great to be lost,' said the rubber haired man as he sat down to a feast in the Hutchinson home shortly after two bells."<sup>14</sup>

Independence Day, July 4, 1919, was celebrated at Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, as the circus continued to jag across the Northeast. The Ringling-Barnum culinary chef, Ollie Webb, provided dishes of Maryland chicken and English plum pudding, washed down with lemonade, for the staff and performers' dinner-dance. Music under the elaborate decorations in the dining tent was provided by Penn Harris's Ladies Jazz Orchestra, and circus medic Doc Shields

led everyone in the long twisty line of a conger dance.

Bastille Day, July 14, saw the circus caught in a great wind and electrical storm at Akron, Ohio, just as the roustabouts were about to lower the big top that night. The top was left up in the rain and became so waterlogged that it sagged and broke two center poles, damaging the tent and interior lighting. Franz Taibosh would have been perfectly familiar from his childhood with the violence of electrical storms on the great plains of South Africa but was no doubt snug in his rail car bunk.

On the way from Parkersburg, West Virginia, on July 20, a former detective with the circus, now chief of police and fire-chief of the small town of Nitro near Charleston,

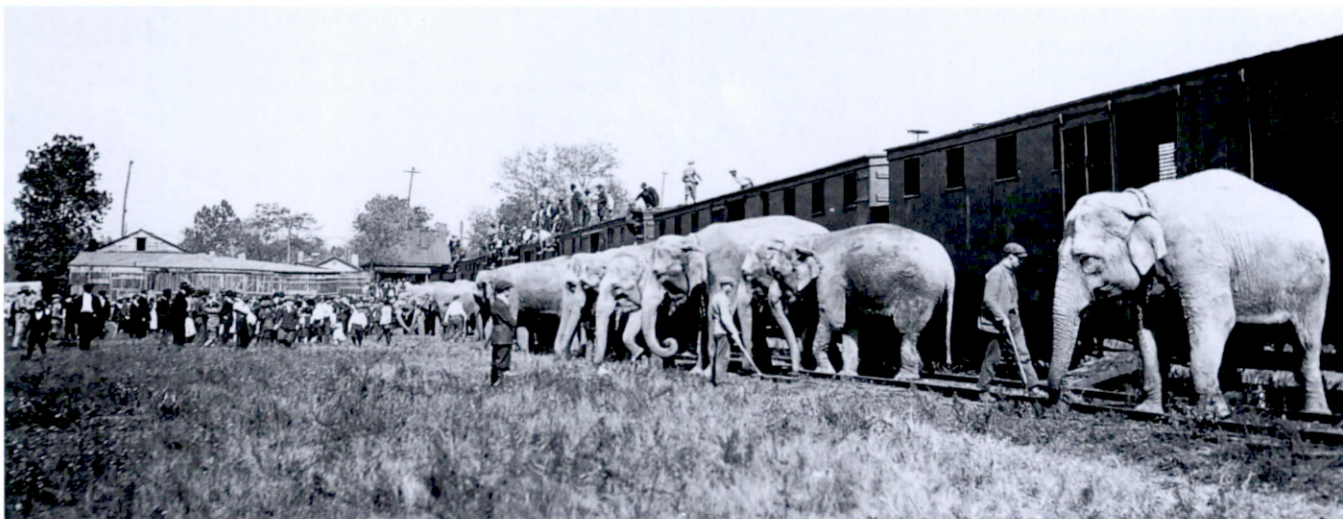
intercepted the train. He drove off his with "old companion" Frank Cook, Doc Shields and others for a chicken dinner. They whiled away the evening in autos and motorboats, eating corn on the cob and blackberry and lemon pies, until they rejoined the circus at Charleston for its performance on the 21st. Perhaps this was another adventure for Franz Taibosh as their butler.

On July 24th the Ringling-Barnum Circus proved its "Sunday School show" credentials by performing at Columbus, Ohio, during the Methodist Centenary Exhibit. Frank Taibosh may have had a chance to visit two women and three men singing as a "Kaffir Quintet" in local churches, presumably Xhosa-speaking Methodists from South Africa.<sup>15</sup>

The climax of Ringling-Barnum's first summer was its stand at Chicago, the Ringling brothers' business base, from August 9 to 17, 1919. It was the first circus allowed to parade inside the Loop, the central business district, for twenty years. Not for the first time the circus became a distraction from civil discontent. Chicago streetcar and elevated railroad workers had been on strike, and racial conflict between competing black, Polish and Lithuanian meat-packers in the stockyards was being blamed on Bolshevik agitators. In the first few days of August, troops of the Illinois National Guard blocked

Ringling-Barnum sideshow bannerline, 1923. Pfening Archives.





Ringling-Barnum elephants being unloaded, Memphis, October 9, 1920. Ralph Miller photo, Pfening Archives.

central Chicago between the university and the stockyards, and workers reluctantly returned to work.

News from the rest of the world reflected similar tensions. General Ironside was pressing a futile British expeditionary force on the Archangel front against Soviet Russia; Sinn Fein was stealing British army rifles in Northern Ireland; Liverpool was racked by riots and London police were on strike; and Jews were being massacred at Odessa. Henry Ford was successfully suing the *Chicago Tribune* for the preposterous libel of calling him an anarchist antagonistic toward capitalism.

Against this background, the *Tribune* welcomed nine days of the circus with a touch of irony as a story which "may bore the children, but it will interest the grown ups." The Big Show was given a prime location on the lakefront, in Grant Park, between Van Buren and Harrison streets, near the shopping district where patrons would be most numerous. The "riotously emblazoned cars" of the circus trains, which had departed from South Bend in Indiana the previous evening, began to draw into the Chicago railroad yards in the early hours of Saturday, August 9. "'Here she comes' yelled one of a crowd of grimy youngsters who gathered in the vicinity of Eighteenth and South Clark streets this morning long before daylight began creeping into the railroad yards. 'Hey, Mick-e-ee! Cir-cus!'"

When the horse-drawn wooden circus wagons began to rumble up Clark Street, "an endless, cavorting, shrieking, laughing juvenile procession streamed behind red and gold wagons, trailed tarpaulin-draped cages, or trotted at a respectful distance behind softly padding elephants as they moved from the freight yards across the Van Buren street bridge into Grant park.

"More than 300 wagons were employed in moving the circus with all its paraphernalia to Grant Park. Besides the main tent, there are twenty-eight smaller ones. . . . There are five troupes of trained seals, a man [Monsieur de Long] who skates on his head from the apex of the tent to the ground, aerialists, acrobats, equestrians and plenty of trained dog and pony acts, and clowns for the little ones."

The big show under the 600-foot big top opened to the public at 2 p.m. on that Saturday, an hour after the sideshow and menagerie tents were opened. On the following Monday the circus paraded down Jackson Boulevard, La Salle and State streets in the Loop: the "sun glistening on golden spangles" amidst the "blare

of red-coated musicians." Ringling-Barnum donated its declared profits in Chicago to a soldiers' and sailors' memorial fund, and U. S. army veterans paraded through the Loop on the following Saturday demonstrating their opposition to the recent riots. Lew Graham expressed his satisfaction that the Chicago newspapers had had a field day, and the sideshow had again broken all its attendance records.<sup>16</sup>

By early September 1919 it was announced that the Ringling-Barnum circus would keep on going into November, milking the return to boom conditions in circus entertainment. The only dent in confidence was a railroad crash en route to Oklahoma of a thirty-car section of the circus train, which hit open switch-points, smashing four cars and killing twelve horses. More than seventy other horses were injured and some had to be put down.

Texas in early October proved to be full of rain: there were a number of washouts when tents could not even be erected. It was fine when the circus arrived at San Antonio, but the scheduled performances were then cancelled because of heavy rain. Paris, Texas, produced the following jottings from a circus man: "So this is Paris! Nowhere to go and the town tied up . . . all that the folks do in Paris is to promenade the main drag until they get sleepy and then go to the cars."

Bets were now being taken on when and where Ringling-Barnum would end its first season. Advance crews of billposters plastered Alabama, Virginia, the Carolinas, Georgia and Tennessee. But too many stands were lost to "rain and mud" in Alabama, and the overflow crowds in Virginia and the Carolinas were a welcome fillip for circus finances: the "side-show has also been getting a good share of the business." In Georgia the weather turned cold and audiences began to drop, so the season was ended on November 1 in the coastal port of Savannah. The circus's number one advance car then led the circus train back to winter quarters at Bridgeport, Connecticut. Once again there was no truth in a rumor that the whole circus would be shipped to England, for a Christmas run at London's Olympia arena.

Ringling-Barnum had covered roughly ten thousand miles on the railroads in 1919 as far west as Denver. But rail travel had been temporarily nationalized under federal government control, to facilitate wartime transport of troops and materiel. The railroads would revert to the control of their separate owners in 1920, and rail rates would inevitably rise.<sup>17</sup>

Franz Taibosh's first year of freedom from Paddy Hepston was 1919. The British authorities had recognized Frank Cook as his

guardian. Cook ensured Taibosh had all creature comforts, including those of the flesh; they partied and ate and drank and used the services of brothels together. As Taibosh's manager, Cook dealt with all money matters. In essence the arrangement was that, in return for Taibosh's summer pay minus pocket money, Cook would provide Taibosh with a winter home.

The two men might party and eat together but did not live together in the summer season. Cook had his own stateroom in a management car. Taibosh had his bunk in a dormitory Pullman car with other sideshow performers. Each season he would have been allocated an upper or lower bunk according to his rank, closer to or farther from the wheels of the sleeper. The rail cars of both big top and small top artists were in the last circus train that left the siding by one o'clock each night after a stand—preceded by a first train with cooks and candy butchers, canvas men and stake drivers ready to set up on a new lot, and second and third trains with the show's livestock and grooms, wardrobe staff, and seating for the big top. The last train carried circus performers. Managers travelled on all three sections, depending on their department.

Wholesome food was an obsession with circus people, who expended so much energy in physical activity every day. Franz was no exception. There was food to be had on the overnight trains in the "pie car"—a "privilege" (private concession) held by Joe Millar. This car, hitched onto the back of the train, served as a social center where performers could snack, smoke, gamble and unwind into the early hours of the morning. When Franz ate and drank in these places, or bought goods from other concessionaires within the circus, such as the candy butchers who sold confectionery, he used a circus form of "tick" or credit note; he did not trust himself with cash.

Franz is said to have become the "pet" of managers and top artists, moving freely among them. They gave him the large Cuban cigars he characteristically smoked. Until the onset of Prohibition, he might also be taken out for a drink to a local hotel on a weekend. His favorite drink was beer; he got much too drunk on hard liquor. Not surprisingly, his command of the English language greatly improved in his first year of liberty, and he became known as a chatterbox, in the distinctive lilting tones of "coloured" South African English derived from Afrikaans.<sup>18</sup>

Franz spent the winter of 1919-1920 with the Cooks, father Frank and daughter Frances and son Edward, in their Albany home. The alternative would have been to stay with other circus folk in or near the Bridgeport winter quarters.

It is not known if Franz and the Cooks attended the circus high society wedding of the year at the Little Church Around the Corner—the Episcopal church of the Transfiguration, also headquarters of the Actors' Church Alliance, in New York City—when Frank White from Wirth's circus in Australia married May Wirth. (She stayed on with Ringling-Barnum despite being offered \$1,000 a week elsewhere.)

Franz and the Cooks could possibly also have attended the rather stranger marriage of Lillian Leitzel's ex-husband Clyde Ingalls, Ringling-Barnum ringside announcer and sideshow manager, to a Czechoslovak dancer, a former Ziegfeld girl, at a Baptist church in New York in early 1920. It was strange because Ingalls and Leitzel had recently travelled overseas as a couple, together with circus band leader Merle Evans. Evans and Leitzel had been stricken by sea-sickness, releasing Ingalls to chase other women around the ship, causing Evans much later to remark: "He was always on the prowl for new dames. Never understood why Leitzel got hooked into him. She so out-classed him. But I'll say this for Ingalls. When it came to announcing an outside bally, there was no equal then or now."<sup>19</sup> BW

## Endnotes

1. *Bridgeport Post*, December 12, 1918, p. 2.
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4. Barbara Cook de Romain interview. De Romain was the daughter of Frank Cook.
5. Willson, *op. cit.*, pp. 199-200.
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9. *Billboard*, April 5, 1919.
10. Russ Simonton, "All Freaks But Us, Say Side-show Freak Folk," unidentified newspaper clipping marked "NEA May 00," George Chindhal Papers, Box 5, Folder 43, Circus World Museum, Baraboo, Wisconsin.
11. *Billboard*, June 14, 1918, p. 44; Andrew J. Bakner, "Side Show Attractions," *Bandwagon*, November-December 1973, p. 36.
12. *Billboard*, August 31, 1929, p. 68; January 23, 1937, "The Final Curtain," pp. 37 and 39; C. A. "Red" Sonnenberg, "Old Time Circus Fixers, Legal Adjusters," *Bandwagon*, September-October 2002, p. 16. Also see Frank A. Cook, "Queer Tricks That People Try to Play on the Circus," *American Magazine*, February, 1923, reprinted in *Bandwagon*, May-June 2011, pp. 42-47.
13. *Billboard*, June 21, 1919, pp. 45 and 82; June 28, 1919, pp. 43 and 46; July 5, 1919, p. 42; July 12, pp. 41 and 45.
14. *Bridgeport Post*, June 27, 1919, June 29, 1919, copy courtesy of Paul Landau and Roger Levine.
15. *Billboard*, July 12, 1919, p. 32; July 19, pp. 41 and 43; August 2, pp. 42-43 and 86.
16. *Ibid.*, August 16, 1919, p. 86; August 30, p. 102; *Chicago Tribune*, August 1, 1919, pp. 4-7; August 3, pp. 1 and 7-8; August 7, pp. 11 and 17; August 8, p. 1; August 9, p. 4; August 10, p. 2; August 11, p. 5; August 15, p. 6.
17. *Billboard*, September 6, 1919, p. 43; September 13, p. 116; September 20, pp. 5 and 38; October 11, p. 44; October 18, p. 46; October 25, pp. 46-47; November 1, pp. 76 and 96; November 15, p. 56; November 22, p. 54; November 29, p. 56.
18. Interview with Barbara Cook de Romain and her notes in Cook Family Papers; Tom Ogden, *Two Hundred Years of the American Circus: From Aba-Daba to Zoppa-Zavata Troupe* (New York: Facts on File, 1993), p. 85-86.
19. *Billboard*, November 22, 1919, p. 80; December 6, p. 80; February 7, 1920, p. 90; March 13, 1920, p. 36; John Lentz, "Merle Evans: His Final Interview," *Bandwagon*, January-February 1988, p. 22; Mark St. Leon, "An Unbelievable Lady Bareback Rider: May Wirth," *Bandwagon*, May-June 1990, p. 10.

# I Inherit a BUSHMAN

By Evelyn Joyce Cook



Author Evelyn Joyce Cook, daughter and sister of great horsemen, and wife of great lawyer, age 90 in her New York city apartment in 1991. Sandy Pfening photo, Pfening Archives.

Hagenbeck-Wallace and Forepaugh-Sells Circus, replacing Jess Adkins who had left the fold to start Cole Bros. Circus with former Sells-Floto manager Zack Terrell. Shortly after the Hagenbeck show's Chicago opening, she and her husband returned to Ringling where his legal expertise was needed. He was replaced by Ralph Clawson as head of the Hagenbeck Circus.

They remained with the Big One until Frank's death in January 1937. Evelyn became Clicko's legal guardian and negotiated a job for him in Harry and Rose Lewiston's sideshow on the J. W. Conklin Carnival in Canada for the 1937 fair season, and on Lewiston's store show in America over the winter of 1937-1938.

In the spring of 1938 Evelyn and Clicko returned to Ringling-Barnum where he appeared in the sideshow until a workmen's strike closed the circus at Scranton, Pennsylvania on June 22. After that Evelyn, daughter Barbara, and Clicko drove cross country to the Los Angeles area where Evelyn hoped to join her friend rider Dorothy Herbert as a motion picture actress.

Her film career never got off the ground, and in 1939 Evelyn and Clicko divided their time between Lewiston's sideshow on the William Glick Carnival and the New York World's Fair. Clicko again joined Lewiston's store show for the winter of 1939-1940. By the spring of 1940 Clicko's health was failing and he went to live with Frances Sullivan, Frank Cook's daughter by his first marriage, and her husband in Claverack, New York, near Hudson. He died on August 31 of that year at their home.

Evelyn Joyce Cook was the daughter of Jack Joyce, Sr., the famous American wild west cowboy and European circus owner. She headlined with her father in big-time vaudeville until 1929, when she and her brother Jack, Jr., later a well-known animal trainer and circus executive, joined the Ringing Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus. Soon after joining Ringling-Barnum, she married Frank Cook, the show's legal adjuster. Along with Cook came his ward Franz Taibosh, better known as Clicko, the Wild Dancing Bushman. Clicko lived as a Cook family member in their penthouse at the Forest Hotel in New York City during the off season.

Evelyn continued as an equestrienne on Ringling until 1935 when her husband was appointed manager of the

The enterprising Evelyn ran a successful restaurant in New York City after her career in the show business ended. Named Alcook's, it was decorated with circus-themed murals painted by the distinguished circus artist Robert Weaver. It became a favorite dining spot for Ringling personnel during the Madison Square Garden engagement each spring. Later, she ran the household of Mrs. William Randolph Hearst, Sr., and managed a private club.

She spent her later years working on a book about her and the Bushman's circus experiences. It was never completed, but fragments, such as those following, have survived. She had a huge circle of friends from her circus days with whom she stayed in touch by both letter and telephone. She knew all the great characters from the Ringling show in the 1930s and loved to reminisce about them and the lively times she had. Evelyn Joyce Cook died in January 1994 at the age of 93. Fred D. Pfening III

This is the story of a little man who stepped directly from the pages of a child's story book. The book closed, never to open again for such was Franz Taibosh. Unit I met this tiny golden-skinned man, I had never heard of the African Bushman. But, from the first time he crossed my path, I was intrigued. As I grew to know him, I was made increasingly aware of his strange fairy-tale appeal.

To adults, he was the memory of childhood, the magic of make-believe only half remembered beneath the encroaching years and cold reality of living in a real and very unmagical world. To children, he was proof that magical little people live in a grownup world. He was one of the legendary little men who rolled ninepins in the Catskill Mountains while old Rip slept. He was the elf hidden beneath a green leaf, the brownie who slid down a moonbeam at night, seen only by childish eyes. He was an enchanting character direct from the land of the Hobbits.

He was a tiny man under five feet in height, yet he was neither a pygmy nor a dwarf. He was cast by his Maker in a different mold from other men. His skin was apricot in color and no amount of baking in the sun ever darkened it beyond a warm copper. His eyes were remarkable, darkest brown with the liquid look of a doe caught unaware along a mountain trail. The whites of his eyes looked as if they had been faintly stained by the deep color of the iris. He had remarkably accurate and far-seeing eyes, regardless of his age. He had tight, spiraled, kinky hair that stood out around his head, resembling nothing so much as an untidy black dust mop. His small ears lay close to his neat head. His hands were finely sculptured with tapered fingers. His feet were wide but well modeled, his legs slender. He was quick on his feet, a fast runner, carrying himself with confidence and natural grace.

But it was his unique little body which aroused one's curiosity. His round belly protruded like that of a pregnant woman. He was marked by the phenomenon of steatopygia, having prominent, overdeveloped buttocks. Legend claims the Bushmen drew on this store of fat when game was scarce, much as a camel relies on its hump.

This is the story of Franz Taibosh, a African Bushman, a tiny remnant of a now-vanished race. Kidnapped in South Africa in the 1800s,

he traveled half around the world, suffering unbelievable hardships, finally to share the life and home of a white man.

He was a highly intelligent little man with an unusual personality. His mind was alert and active. That he could neither read nor write was in itself tragic. He could not count and had no idea of the passage of time as we know it. His life had its drawbacks and definite limitations. He could never go out alone, except for a few blocks near his home. By the same token, he was not concerned with politics, depression or prosperity. He escaped ulcers, heart disease, stress and other maladies attendant to life in the twentieth century.

He was but vaguely aware of racial problems, although he was referred to as "that little nigger" when we traveled in the South. For years he had been protected from the barbs of life by his friends and adopted family who stood between him and harsh reality.

His was a Trilby-like existence. Since childhood, his life had been governed by the whims of others. While the native Bushmen in Africa was a master of his fate, Franz's every move in the white man's world was dictated by another. His marvelously pliable character permitted him to bend like a willow in the wind of his destiny. At the last, he was a wise and serene old gentleman who values had finally been resolved. He had known disillusionment and disappointment in his life but found contentment within himself, living each day as it came, knowing there was always tomorrow. Even in the white man's world with its complexities, he had found his little niche where he was understood and loved. It is about these years I write, that he may never be forgotten. . . .

Paddy Conklin, the great Canadian carnival man, wanted to book the Bushman for the season of 1937. I told him I would think it over and wire him. I talked it over with Franz and was surprised at the alacrity with which he welcomed the idea. Living with only females was not the Bushman's idea of a full life.

"Ye dink is goot idea? Ach dink is goot idea. When Ach leave, Maw?"

A contract was signed and letters exchanged regarding the care, living conditions and physical protection against kidnapping to be given Franz.

Barbara hugged and kissed the Bushman goodbye. My oldest daughter Joyce was embraced around the middle and told, "Be goot and mind Mama Cook."

We boarded the night train to Montreal. I planned to remain there a day before putting the Bushman on the train for Winnipeg, where he would join the Conklin Show. After dinner, we returned to our section to await the porter. The conductor came to take our tickets. He looked at the Bushman's immigration card after giving my passport a glance. I was only another American. But an African Bushman . . . well, he'd have to inquire further about that.

"Is this all you have for Franz Taibosh?" the conductor asked, studying the immigration card.

"That's all that's necessary," I responded.

This didn't impress the conductor, who was accustomed to pulling sable coats out of pillow cases, Scotch out of hot water bottles and Chinese out of duffle bags.

"Yeah, but you might not get back in this country with him," he said skeptically.

"I've been in and out of Canada innumerable times, traveled everywhere with him, and had absolutely no trouble." I didn't mention that the Bushman had been one of fifteen hundred circus people who had gone across the Canadian border on a circus manifest.

"I'm telling you they won't let you back in with him." He nodded at Franz, who sat smoking unperturbedly.

"I'll worry about that when it happens," I answered with my usual philosophy.

The conductor handed me my passport, shook his head, and gloomed, "I'll bring this back later, putting the Bushman's immigration card in his pocket.

The porter arrived, crisp and polite. The Bushman greeted him: "Hollo, buddy. Wa' ye want, boy?"

"Good evening, sir, you like to have your berth made up now or later?"

"You can make it up now," I said.

The Bushman turned to me. "Wa' he say Maw?"

"Shall I make your berth for one or two Ma'am?"

"I beg your pardon!"

"You want your berth made up for one or for two?"

"I want *both* berths made up!" I tried to look indignant to cover my own amusement.

"I thought he maybe is your husband, Ma'am."

"He is not my husband," I said.

"Wa' he say, Maw?" Franz asked impatiently.

"He wants to know if you're my husband."

The Bushman thought about that a minute, started to chuckle, and then his belly shook with laughter. He wiped the tears from his eyes, shook his head, and consigned the porter to that state he found suitable for those he couldn't understand: "Dat boy plenty nuts in de koop, Maw."

When traveling with Franz, there was never any question of who would sleep where. I knew where I would sleep. The Bushman quickly pointed to the upper berth. "Ye schleep der, Maw."

While Franz Taibosh, Clicko the African Bushman, didn't like elephants or horses, he posed for this picture with one of the African bush elephants on Ringling-Barnum in 1936. Evelyn J. Cook photo, Pfening Archives.





Clikco, upper row, second from right, and his brethren in the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey sideshow in 1933. E. J. Kelty photo, Pfening Archives.

He took no chances on my sleeping in the lower berth, even though I always seem to be looking for a blanket at 3:00 a.m., whereas he never complained of the cold. So, up I went.

Now that Franz was leaving us, all his little quirks seemed to endear him and I wondered if I were wise in letting him go. "Would you rather not go? We can go back to New York, Franz."

"Ye crazy, Maw? Ach lack to work. Ach a maan. Ye stay home wid Bobby [Barbara]. Ach come baak, Maw."

He lighted a cigar from a box I had given him. He looked at it suspiciously, then glared at me. "Yeesus! Where de hell you get dis rope?" he asked in disgust.

"Those are good cigars. The clerk at Macy's said they were the best, and besides, they were on sale."

"Ye no know a daam ding about ceegars. Ach a maan. Ach know. Papa Cook, he know. For years, Franz had smoked the finest custom-made Havana cigars given him by John Ringling, promoter Tex Rickard and my husband Frank. They had kept him well supplied and he would smoke one after another all day until the room was thick with smoke. In South Africa, the native Bushman prefers tobacco to all other gifts. Franz was no different.

"Why ye never schmoke ceegars, Maw?" If ye schmoke ceegars, ye no buy dis rope!" He chucked over his small joke.

My intention on arriving in Montreal was to go to a friend's home, leave the Bushman there, and then make the necessary arrangements for sending him to Winnipeg on the night train. As usual, everything suddenly became complicated.

The following morning we arrived in Montreal. The morning was already hot when we left the train and promised a sweltering July day. We were escorted to the Immigration Office inside Windsor Station, the first of many offices we were to visit that day.

First, I was questioned about the Bushman's card which bore his name, picture, and status as a permanent resident of the United States clearly marked on it. This made no impression on the Canadian Immigration authorities. They were more interested in the fact his birthplace was Bechuanaland, South Africa.

The officials disappeared into another office with Franz's little card. Meanwhile, we sat, growing hungrier by the minute. Franz smoked and looked more annoyed at me as the morning passed. It soon became obvious that an American woman passing through Canada with an escort such as mine was not a common occurrence.

Officials came out of offices to look, stare and disappear. I was asked more questions and additional identification was requested. I tried to explain that we were in the habit of traveling back and forth, in and out of Canada like homing pigeons, that Franz had been across the border twenty times. Since none of these officials had seen him, it cast a doubt on all I said. I was getting nowhere and the Bushman was growing more impatient.

At last an official came out of an office. "Mrs. Cook, we're sorry, but we are not satisfied with these papers. What if this man Taibosh should become a public charge in Canada?"

"Good Lord," I said. "He can't. He has a contract for the season with the Conklin Shows. He's coming back home to New York at the end of the season. Isn't that definite?"

It wasn't definite to them. They needed something more reassuring than a signed and notarized contract. I called Mr. Conklin in Winnipeg, but was unable to reach him. The immigration officers



A natty Franz Taibosh at Pike's Peak, Colorado on July 29, 1938. Photo taken during the great cross-country trek made by Evelyn Cook, her daughter Barbara, and the Bushman after closing of Ringling show in Scranton, Pennsylvania on June 22. Evelyn J. Cook photo, Pfening Archives.

were more unhappy. I called Washington without success. Everyone was off for the day or out to lunch, which was something the Bushman and I hadn't managed.

At the telegraph office on Peel Street, I sent wire to Roger O'Donnell and Melvin Hildreth, Washington attorneys I knew. I sent another to Mr. Conklin asking him to establish the Bushman's identity and the validity of his contract. I called both Washington and Winnipeg again, but to no avail.

When I returned an hour later, I found the Bushman had been transferred to another office. He was dismayed and fearful that I wouldn't find him. He was angry but relieved when he saw me. His patience was at an end, however.

"Why ye no tell dees daam fools someding, Maw? Ye domb? Ye no can talk?"

"Shh," I cautioned Franz as an immigration official approached us. This one listened to my explanations of contracts, former trips into Canada and the circus's manifest. We were moved to yet another office where I repeated my story. No one wanted to give us permission to enter Canada.

"This is all so simple," I argued. Still, I felt like a fugitive from justice myself, caught entering Canada illegally and wondering now if I would get back home. All this would be so simple if Frank was alive.

"You simply can't go traveling about with this man you know, Madam."

The Bushman's card caused me the most concern. It kept disappearing, then reappearing.

"Now, let us see Mr. . . . ah . . . Taibosh's card again, please," someone would say to me and it disappear again."

"But you have it," I insisted.

"No, we gave it back to you, Madam," they countered.

"You certainly did not! Where on earth is it? Bush, did anyone give you your card?" Franz had given up talking for that day. His angry, silent fact spoke for him.

"Well, by Jove, I did have it all along, didn't I?" said Geoffrey Mason, a pleasant immigration officer with a handlebar moustache. He was an Englishman, exuded authority and I stuck close to him once I detected his sympathy for me and my predicament.

"Mr. Mason, please don't lose that card or I'll never get him home." The next thing I knew it disappeared.

We had had no lunch. Franz was hot, disgruntled and thirsty. I was more than a little worried. My self-confidence, along with my early morning freshness had long since departed. My nose was shiny, my hair needed combing, my light wool suit was too warm, my blouse was rumpled and I was generally uncomfortable. And now, the card had disappeared again! All this was guaranteed to bring me to a state near hysterics. In my imagination, I could see us marched to the Canadian border or in a hangman's noose in around our necks in Quebec. I had been "jolly well'ed," "rawthered," and "I say'ed" one too many times. I had been shuffled around all day. This was too much. It was with these dark thoughts that I was asked once more for the Bushman's card, which had been misplaced.

"Where is that card, Mr. Mason? You had it. Please . . . ohhhhh," I groaned. . . .

By 1938 many of my friends from circus and vaudeville days lived in and around Los Angeles. My brother Jack had a house near Hollywood which he kept as a combination home and training quarters for his horses. Other friends performed their circus acts at Louie Goebel's Jungleland animal park in Thousand Oaks in the San Fernando Valley.

I felt left out of everything with all my friends doing film, circus or rodeo work. The urge of the trouper was still strong in me; the open road beckoned me to the sawdust world I knew. But, I was determined to buy a home and make a life for my daughters. They needed to enter school. Further than that, I refused to think. How was I to make a living?

A friend of mine was a nurse at RKO Studios. She suggested I take a secretarial course since I had decided to give up show business. The studios needed capable secretaries, and working for a film company wouldn't be cutting myself off entirely from the show business. She referred me to a secretarial school in Beverly Hills.

I made an appointment and went to consult the director of the school. She looked at me and asked abruptly, "How old are you, Mrs. Cook?" She hadn't wasted any time getting down to essentials.

"Thirty [she was actually thirty-seven]," I said. I wondered if I should have tried to look more mature.

"Thirty! You're even older than I thought," she exclaimed. I knew I should have pulled that white hair I found this morning. She looked at her watch and hurried on, "I would advise you, my dear, to forget about secretarial work. The studios want young girls these days. Now, there must be *something* else you can do."

"Yes indeed, I can ride a horse," I remarked brightly.

The woman looked startled, glanced at her watch again, and brought the interview to an end. "Goodby, my dear, I'm sure you'll find something."

I gathered the remnants of my shattered ego about me and left her office. In the lobby of the building hung a large mirror. I had taken a smug look of approval at myself on the way to her office. Now, as I passed it again, I was surprised at the broken old lady of thirty I saw.

The next day I had lunch with my friend from RKO and she asked, "How did you make out yesterday?"

"I didn't. My brilliant business career ended before it began." I told her of my usual phenomenal luck. She was indignant.

"That isn't the only business school. I know another one. Go there this afternoon and don't take no for an answer. You're a smart girl. You have looks and brains. Look at all those horses you've ridden," she ended lamely.

"Brains had nothing to do with riding, just strong legs and that ring whip dad used on me."

"You married a smart man, didn't you?"

"That was pure luck, too. But I appreciate your efforts to cheer me up." I laughed a bit wryly and we parted.

I started my search for a house in earnest. There were plenty of homes for sale in the area. One day in Glendale I found a house I liked, a white stucco, pseudo-Spanish with two bedrooms and a den, perfect for the Bushman. A big living room with windows looking toward the mountains afforded an ever-changing view. Gardenias bloomed beneath the windows. The front of the house had a patio where showers of bougainvillea spilled over one wall, while the other was banked with flaming poinsettias. In the back of the house hundreds of rose bushes blossomed. There was a small pool, a badminton court, a trestled arbor, and a large grassy yard with a playhouse for my daughter Barbara, and a garden for the Bushman to work in. It was the ideal home for us.

A month later I took title on my first home. The agent and lawyer were present, the papers signed, and the deed handed to me. Everyone was satisfied, particularly me.

The agent turned to me as we left the office and remarked, "By the way, Mrs. Cook, I suppose you'll want a maid once you're settled."

"No, I don't think so. Why do you ask?"

"There's a city ordinance here, if you have black help, they must be out of the city limits at sundown or by six o'clock."

I was speechless. Then I burst out, "What sort of law is *that*?"

"City ordinance. At six o'clock you'll see all the maids at the bus stops. That's what makes this such a nice place to live."

"That's the stupidest thing I've ever heard of! Don't tell me this law is everywhere in California."

"Indeed not," the lawyer broke in proudly, "just here."

I thought instantly of how this would affect the Bushman. "You should have told me this before," I said. The Bushman had never been with me during my house hunting and the agent knew nothing of my circus background.

"I didn't think that was important."

"We have an African Bushman living with us, part of our family." Quickly I added, "He isn't black, but . . . but the neighbors will think he is. What am I going to do now?"

To the agent I had been a pleasant young widow with two children looking for a small home. This was the first she had heard of the Bushman. Her expression clearly showed that he was my problem. She had my certified check. I had the deed to the house. She had the determined look of a lady on her way to pick up her commission. I was left with a new problem.

The house was mine, regardless of ordinances or Bushmen. With the philosophy of show business, I set about furnishing our new home. In a short time the house was ready. My years of hotel and

apartment life were at an end, and I indulged in the luxuries I'd always wanted: sterling silver, fine china, and crystal, all with no regard to cost.

The result was completely satisfying and we moved to our new home in time for the Christmas holidays. I smuggled the Bushman in one night after dark and cautioned him not to go outside without me. Franz was delighted with his room with its circus posters and pictures of his circus friends. He and Barbara investigated every corner of the house. We had our first dinner in the living room before a roaring fire I built in the fireplace. It was the first fire I had ever built and it looked like a funeral pyre that threatened to burn down the house until Joyce thoughtfully threw a pail of water on it.

"Must be something wrong with the flue. I never saw a fire burn like that."

"Didn't you ask about it?" Joyce asked.

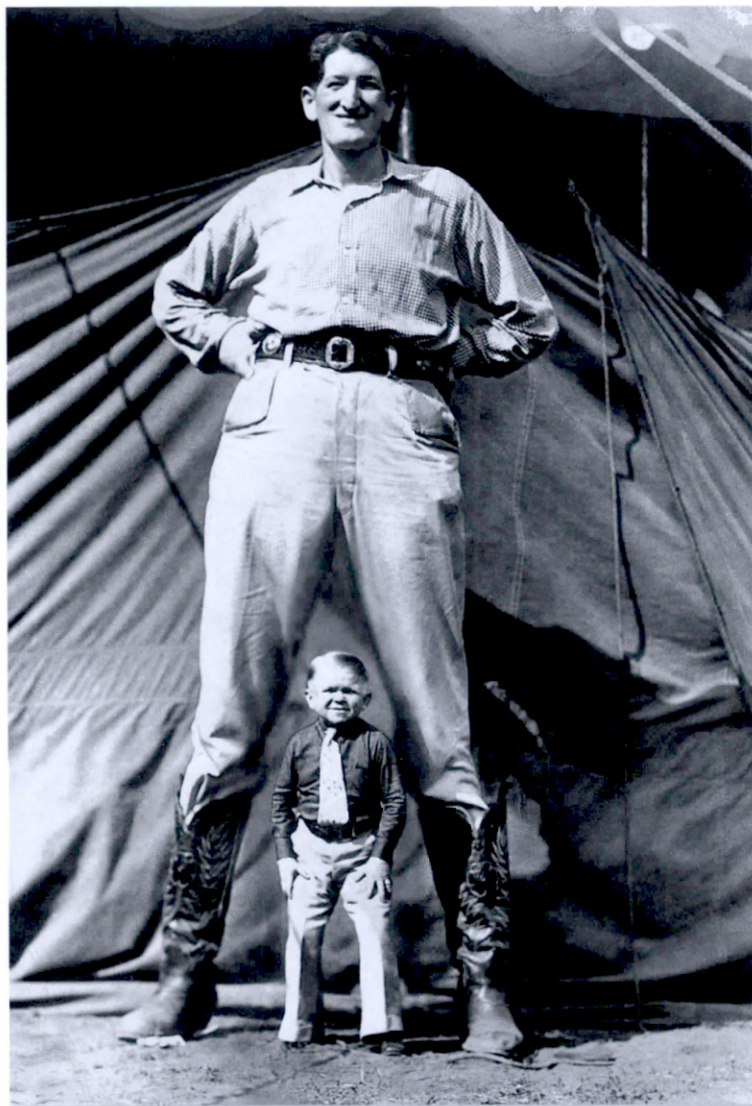
"A fireplace is a fireplace. It's supposed to work."

"Mother, you're never logical about anything."

"Why should anyone be logical about a fireplace? That's ridiculous."

"Did you take out fire insurance?" my daughter asked, looking at

Jack Earle the giant and Harry Doll the midget were among Clicko's best friends in the Ringling-Barnum sideshow. H. A. Atwell photo, Pfening Archives.





One of the highlights of Clicko's California sojourn occurred when the Doll family, friends from Ringling days, came to visit. This pitch card for the Dolls dates from 1944. Pfening Archives.

the mess of charred, wet wood in the fireplace and one the floor.

"Oh, they must have insurance on the house. Everyone does."

"Mother! It's *your* house now. *You're* the one who's suppose to look after it. You should take a business course."

A chill had crept over the room and I looked at the heating arrangement set into the floor and which I had wanted to cover with carpeting. "I wonder if that thing works and how you turn it on," I mused.

"Didn't you ask, mother?" Joyce looked at me in amazement.

"I never thought we'd use it. This is sunny California—it's supposed to be warm all the time."

"It was cold in the Hollywood apartment."

"Well, dear, that was an apartment. This is a house." That made sense to me even if it didn't to my daughter.

Early the following morning the Bushman was up and dressed. Breakfast was no sooner over than he wanted to go outdoors. He was anxious to look at the plants and flowers in our yard.

"Ach laak see de dress. Maybe dey need feexin'," he said impatiently.

"Wait until the gardener comes, Franz, then we'll all go out."

"Why ye get de daam gardener? Ach de gardner." He was indignant and I couldn't blame him.

"Wait until later, Bush, I'm busy right now," was my lame excuse.

"Ach no need ye, maw. Ach a maan. Ach go by meself."

I put him off from day to day. He would look at me, shake his head, sigh, and go back to his beer and cigars. He had long since resigned himself to the vagaries of the female mind.

He thought I was carrying my whims too far, however, when, after the sun had set and I knew our neighbors were at dinner, I would suggest a walk and take him out to wander about the garden and yard surrounding our house.

"Ach no can see a daam ding, maw!" he complained. "Why de hell ye no com ein de daytime? Ye no see nudding. De flowers dey all 'sleep. Yeesus!"

I felt guilty when I saw how happy he was with "hees house," and the plans he made for "hees garden," and his eagerness to "fix de flowers." Meanwhile I had made discreet inquiries about the city ordinance and found it was all too true. I became more concerned with what seemed a ridiculous situation.

I was still wondering how to introduce our Bushman to the neighbors when one Sunday a car stopped in front of our house. The door opened and out trooped the Doll family. The Dolls were a family of four midgets; three sisters and a brother. They had worked and traveled for many years on the Ringling Circus. They were all diminutive, perfectly formed, intelligent and possessed keen senses of humor. They lived in Sarasota, Florida, where their home, with its scaled-to-size furniture, was called the "Doll's house."

They were in Hollywood playing Munchkins in *The Wizard of Oz*. The Dolls and Jack Earle the giant were Franz's favorite friends. He was overjoyed to see them after trouping with them for many years. Barbara at two years of age had met Daisy Doll and fell in love with her immediately. Daisy was the Christmas doll ever child dreams of.

Barbara was now eight, but still enchanted with Daisy, her sisters and brother. She refused to accept Daisy as an adult. Without success I had explained to her that midgets were adults and wished to be treated as other adults did. Barbara couldn't understand how anyone would want to be an adult when they were so magically small. At two years old she had looked up into Daisy's face. Now at eight she looked down into it. Barbara hung on Daisy's every word.

The Bushman immediately began talking about "hees house," showing them his room and then the rest of the house. Afterward

out the door they trooped into the garden: the Bushman, the four "dolls," and Barbara. It was a group straight out of a fairy tale. Daisy's tiny Pomeranian dog scampered excitedly ahead of the group who admired the garden and the blooming rose bushes, looked into the pool, exclaimed over the poinsettias, and knelt to pick gardenias under the window. Franz walked with them, never mentioning that until this very moment, he had never seen the outside of the house in the daytime.

I listened to their childlike voices and thought about their world, a completely different one from others. The Bushman's voice broke in, "Look, Daisy, Mama Cook say dese is 'mudder an chicken plant. Ach no see dem before. Ye b'lieve dat?"

"Yes, Franz, we have some in our yard in Sarasota," Daisy answered in her high-pitched voice.

"Ye do, Dolly? Ach dink Ach laak dem den."

By this time they had walked to the front of the house and stood looking at the bougainvillea spilling over the patio wall. Until that moment our street had been quiet and deserted. But suddenly I was aware of unusual activity for a Sunday afternoon.

The neighborhood came to life. Hedges needed to be clipped, rose bushes sprayed, yards watered, trees pruned. The outdoors suddenly became attractive to our neighbors.

Curtains fluttered at windows across the way and on one pretext or another. Our neighbors appeared on their front lawns or porch-

es, silently regarding the little group before them. Somehow I felt sorry for them. What was normal in our lives was oddly fantastic to them. By their silent regard I knew it was beyond their understanding. Their lives in comparison seemed suddenly dull and I was grateful I didn't have to swap with them.

That evening, we all drove to the San Fernando Valley for dinner and while the Dolls were on the West Coast we spent quite a bit of time with them.

Things worked out for Franz. With the exception of four sisters from Iowa who lived next door to us, our neighbors were friendly and gracious, taking my children and the Bushman to their hearts. Barbara started to school and church. The Bushman occupied himself in the garden.

One morning I stood in the back yard trying to decide why a wire was attached to a branch of a large tree outside the dining room window and then to our house.

"Bush, what's that wire for?" I asked.

"Ach no know, Maw. He no look goot."

"Shall I take it off?"

"Ach tin kiss goot ye take heem down. Ye think so, Maw?"

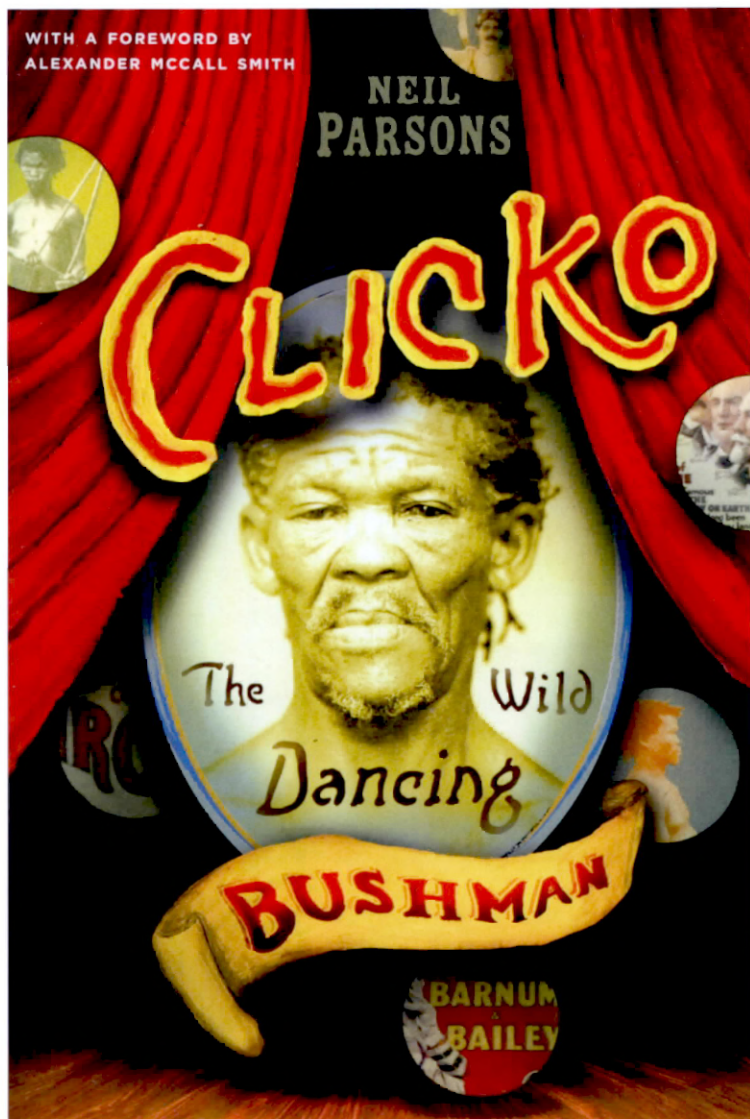
"I'll have it taken down tomorrow," I said.

If I asked the Bushman's opinion on anything he agreed with me. If it turned out well, he took the credit. If it turned out disastrously, I was definitely to blame. . . . **BW**

# HOLIDAY GREETINGS

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# Clicko

## The Wild Dancing Bushman

by  
Neil Parsons

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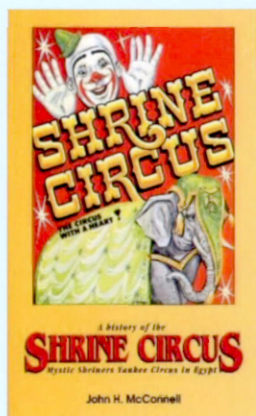
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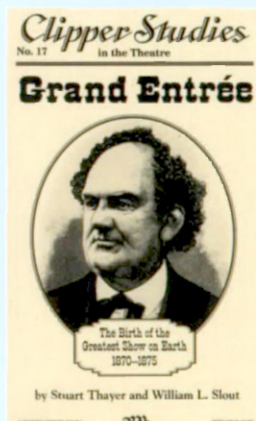
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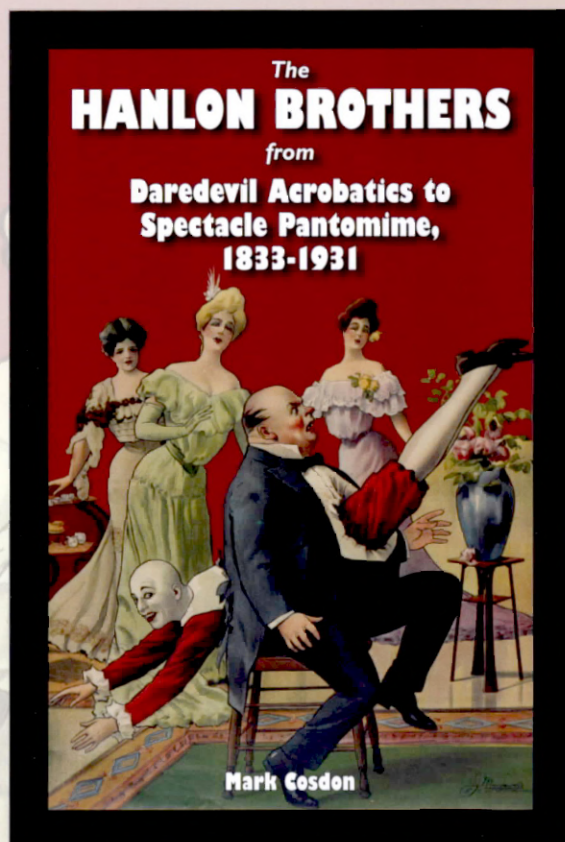
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